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CHRISTIANITY

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SUPERNATURAL

BY

CHARLES F. D'ARCY, D.D.

BISHOP OF OSSORY

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

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PREFACE

THIS little book is an endeavour to indicate, in a tentative way, the place of Transcendence in Theology.

The idea of Immanence is so prevalent, and has so completely dominated the minds of Christian thinkers of many schools, that we are in danger of forgetting how large a space remains for the contrasted conception.

The line of thought which runs through these chapters is the same as that which the writer attempted to express, in a more philosophical form, in his *Idealism and Theology*.

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CHRISTIANITY AND THE SUPERNATURAL

CHAPTER I

THE SUPERNATURAL

FROM the beginning Christianity presented itself to the world as a religion filled with the supernatural. The first Christian writings that we possess—those nearest to the events to which they refer—contain, if possible, more of this element than the later. St. Mark's Gospel, confessedly the earliest, records a far greater number of miracles than St. John's. St. Paul's Epistles of the first and second groups dwell with far greater insistence on the fact of the Resurrection of our Lord than the later Epistles. Compare the first Epistle to the Corinthians with that to the Ephesians. If we had to judge of St. Paul's presentation of Christianity from the latter alone, we might, with some show of reason, regard him as a great spiritual philosopher, to whom the Resurrection stood for a metaphysical conception rather than a historical fact. But the earlier Epistles set the Apostle before us as a teacher to whom the historical fact and the evidence for it were matters of primary importance, whose whole life and labour depended on their truth and accuracy.

Here the order is exactly the reverse of what our modern rationalising theories require. Instead of finding that, as time goes on, miraculous details accumulate more and more

round a saintly life and a noble doctrine, we find the life of Christ and the supernatural inextricably united from the very first, and, as believers reflect more and more upon the wonderful life, the doctrinal or theological element fills an increasing space.

In modern times the growth of science and of the rationalising spirit has made it difficult to maintain a belief in the supernatural. A miraculous tale occurring in an ordinary history throws doubt on the whole narrative. It has become an accepted canon of criticism that accounts which involve such tales cannot be regarded as strictly historical. And the principle must be admitted. It is perfectly true, as has been often said, that miracles do not happen. They certainly do not happen in our ordinary experience: they are not the stuff of which the history of our own times is made.

And this is no new discovery. Rationalism was as powerful a force in the eighteenth century as it is to-day: it was, indeed, so far as we can judge, even more powerful. It had leavened cultivated thought even more thoroughly. Its triumph was greater and more perfect, for the current philosophies of the time had not that profound and reverent sense of the mystery in things which marks our own age.

Yet the names which have lived, and which for us now represent most characteristically the Christianity of the eighteenth century, are those of great thinkers and leaders who frankly and fearlessly, and in spite of the tendency of their age, held Christianity as a definitely supernatural religion: Butler, Berkeley, Paley, Wesley. In character, in mind, in work, these men were very diverse; yet they owed their power to one great faith, which they all held and all maintained in different ways—faith in a supernatural Christianity. This was the inspiration of the philosophical thinker as well as of the man of action.

And when we look back over the last hundred years, with their amazing development of scientific knowledge, with their extraordinary record of advance in the mapping out of nature on the one hand, and in the writing of its

history on the other; when we reflect upon the rise of the doctrine of evolution, with its great corollary, the continuity of nature; and when we consider how these ideas have captivated the popular imagination, we cannot but be struck with astonishment at the power and variety of the religious movements which have taken place during the same period within the Christian Church, and at the enthusiasm with which Christian ideals have been applied to modern problems. And the most wonderful thing is that the Christianity which has displayed this splendid vitality has kept clearly in view that supernatural character which was impressed upon it at the very beginning of its history. In a world which is doing its best to deny the possibility of the supernatural, the most supernatural of all religions has shown itself the most potent of spiritual forces.

It is no exaggeration to say that Christianity is the most supernatural of all religions. Buddhism is, at heart, a philosophy. Mohammedanism is Theism, with a belief in future life. In these religions the supernatural element, when it is found, is not of the essence of the creed. With Christianity it is otherwise. To eliminate the supernatural is to destroy. In the face of much earnest thinking of our own time, this may seem a daring assertion. There are many who think they can allow the supernatural to drop away, and yet retain what they conceive to be the essence of the Christian creed. But they have against them the experience of all the Christian centuries, and the creeds of all the Christian communities; and they have against them this extraordinary fact, that during the last two hundred years, while rationalism has been gaining a complete ascendency in every other department of human life, Christianity has always been able to renew its vigour by a strong reassertion of its supernatural faith. Non-miraculous Christianity in its various forms may serve as a creed for certain select intellectual coteries, but it has shown no power to create any definite organic social life, nor to move the hearts of the many, nor even to excite the antagonism of the unbelieving.

We have used the word "Supernatural" in the vague old-fashioned manner. But it is necessary to ask, What do we mean by it?

It has become a commonplace in some schools of thought that the very idea of the supernatural is now obsolete, and that the word which expresses it must be abandoned. Science has given us a great conception of the unity of nature and has taught us that the laws which pervade the whole are unvarying. When facts are observed which seem to violate any of these laws, it is a mistake to jump hastily to the conclusion that here is a realm outside the system of nature. In due time, when science has done her patient work, it will be found, we are told, that all such facts must be included; they are due to the operation of natural forces which were formerly overlooked, and are instances of the sway of laws previously unknown. The process of explanation is always an extension of the field of the natural.

In recent times psychology has been busy with large classes of facts which used to be dismissed as unworthy of scientific examination. So far the work has consisted principally in the observation and sorting of materials; but the whole purpose of the investigation is to bring the facts in question within the sphere of natural law. And who can doubt that only in so far as this is done can there be a true science of psychology? Thus as knowledge progresses the natural takes possession of realm after realm once assigned to the supernatural, and the probability is that, if our capacity were great enough, we should find the whole universe to be one vast coherent system.

How, then, can we venture to speak at all of the Supernatural? Is not the expression, along with the idea which it endeavours to express, hopelessly misleading?

Further, from the side of biblical theology, there comes the objection that the word is not to be found in Holy Scripture. We find, indeed, the contrast between the natural and the spiritual (*το ψυχικόν* and *τό πνευματικόν*) in 1 Cor. xv. 44–46 and elsewhere; also we find the heavenly things contrasted with the earthly in many ways. But the conception of a natural order of things working as a

mechanical system according to its own laws, and broken in upon now and then by forces belonging to a different, a super-natural, order, is, we are told, not to be found in the teaching of the Bible.

In the main it is true that the contrast between the natural and the supernatural, as it is found in the thought of the modern world, belongs essentially to a period of transition—that period when the modern conception of the material universe as a system of things bound by unvarying law was taking hold of the human mind.

This great system, in which every effect follows cause with absolute certainty, and the knowledge of which is assured when the ability to predict occurrences is proved, came to be called "Nature." What the law of gravitation was to the thought of the eighteenth century, the law of the conservation of energy was to that of the earlier nineteenth—a demonstration of the material universe as a mechanical system. And then in the latter part of the nineteenth century there emerged the great conception of evolution, revealing the whole process of creation as a development according to law. Thus nature, in its widest extent through space, and in its whole history in time, appears as a universe of ordered events. What place can be found in such a system for miracle, or for the advent of the Christ? For believers as well as unbelievers, the first effect of the great change in thought was to harden the idea of the supernatural and to present it as the breaking in upon the natural of powers belonging to a wholly different order of being. The Almighty seemed to be banished from His universe in its ordinary working, and to manifest Himself only in the extraordinary, the unusual. And as every advance in knowledge diminished the realm of the extraordinary, the work of science, from the religious point of view, seemed to be a driving of the Divine out of things altogether. Hence the opposition between science and religion, with a hatred of the supernatural on one side and an eager clinging to it on the other.

Recent religious thought has entered a necessary protest against this whole way of regarding the work of God in the

universe. The unity of nature is, after all, a revelation of the unity of God. The unfailing character of the laws of nature is a witness to His infinite trustworthiness. To think of the universe as a great machine in which the Eternal intervenes only on very special occasions is to forget that He is the Indwelling Spirit as well as the Creator. "In Him we live and move and have our being." All the laws of nature are His laws, and all the forces of nature are operations of His will. We believe in the immanent as well as in the transcendent God.

The fact, therefore, that the universe is ordered according to law is not a reason for denying the Divine control of it; rather it is a support to that faith which discerns the hand of God in all the events of the world and in all departments of experience.

But when we have got so far, we have not dealt finally with the question of the supernatural; for there may be evidence to show that God's work in nature is not the only form of Divine activity. Again, we have in our own experience instances of laws which seem to us higher in kind than the uniformities of nature. The moral law of which we are conscious tells, not what is or what must be, but what ought to be; and in obedience to it we constantly endeavour to modify or counteract many of those very laws of nature which we have just recognised as laws of God. We have the faith that the moral law is also a law of God, and that it has a character which exalts it above those other laws of His which rule in the realm of cause and effect. In the strength of this faith we use our personal will, and intervene in the succession of natural events; we struggle, and often successfully, against the forces of nature, making the earth to yield us its treasures and the physical elements to serve our purposes; we fight against disease and other natural evils, and frequently prevail. Nor can such action be referred to law like that which keeps the stars in their courses, or those which control the combinations of the chemical elements. No effort of mind can reduce moral law to physical law. The laws which guide purpose are different in kind from those which control

cause and effect. Certainly the former cannot be explained in terms of the latter. Further, the laws of purpose are higher in the scale than those of physical causation: our whole moral life is an assertion of the superiority.

When, with these thoughts in our mind, we turn back upon the revelation of the universe which science has given us, we see that the question is not the simple matter which it appeared at first. Science, we now see, deals only with selected departments of experience. It carefully eliminates all that does not belong to the special department on which it is engaged. Especially does it remove from its consideration the disturbances produced by human activity. Yet the world as we know it in our experience is full of these disturbances; and no view, of the world as a whole, which leaves them out can claim to be complete.

Moreover, if we think of the universe as all of a piece, and all under natural law, we are led to the conception of a great multitude of physical causes all connected together into one system, pervaded by one universal plan. How can such a system be the work of one supreme will? Evidently only through its being the expression of a single great purpose. But, if this be so, what about the multitude of human purposes which express themselves in the world? We find ourselves led back at once to the old conflict between the will of man and the Divine Providence. It is the controversy about predestination all over again.

The only reason for returning here to these ancient problems is that in this way we can see at once that the apparent simplification which has been attained by the modern scientific conception of the unity of nature does not get rid of the problem of the supernatural. Our experience shows us the existence of higher laws than those which belong to the physical world as science regards it. And when this has been grasped we find God and man face to face in a region of being and of action higher than that which we call "Nature."

The astonishing complication which is thus revealed to us makes clear the impossibility of settling such a question as that before us by the assertion of some one

general principle. The natural sciences have assuredly given us a new insight into the great truth of the unity of the world; but it would be a fatal error to regard the special statement of that unity which has thus come to light as valid for departments of experience with which the natural sciences have never found themselves able to deal. So far as our power extends we must grasp all the facts we must lose hold of no side of the truth. We must take all that experience gives us, whether it be the experience of the individual or the records of history.

When we endeavour to present to our minds the essentials of the Christian Faith, we find that our thoughts fasten inevitably upon a Person, and that this Person is marked out by certain attributes which are not in accordance with our ordinary experience. Though miracle is not placed first among the evidences of His mission (see John iv. 48, x. 38, &c.), it was a necessary element in the manifestation of Him to the world. The miracles of our Lord are usually described as "signs" (σημεῖα), "works" (ἔργα), or "powers" (δυνάμεις), words which indicate their character as witnesses to His nature and mission. They are never mere wonders or portents. The word τέρατα (wonders) is indeed frequently used with reference to them, but never alone. It is in every instance united with σημεῖα (signs), showing that the signs were also wonders; they were evidences which struck the imagination, and so awakened attention. Our Lord is therefore never represented as a mere wonder-worker. His marvellous works were part of the revelation of Himself which He gave to man. They have a character which stamps them as Divine and which reveals their author. "No man can do these signs that Thou doest except God be with him" was the inevitable deduction of an honest but cautious observer. It was the least that could be said by a candid intelligence. Our Lord did not base His claim to human allegiance on His mighty works. That claim sprang from His consciousness of His own authority and His recognition of His unique relation to God and man. But in stooping to human infirmity—an essential part of

His work, as we must remember—and in meeting the attacks of His critics, His miracles were a necessary element in His presentation of Himself. So it was that He said, in reply to the challenge which He detected in the minds of the scribes who were present when he declared the pardon of the palsied man: "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (He saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house" (Mark ii. 8–11). Here the miracle is deliberately presented as our Lord's own demonstration of His spiritual authority. The modern critic may very easily raise the question as to the connection between the authority to pardon and the power to cure disease. How can the claim to spiritual power be proved by an exhibition of control over natural forces? No doubt, as a general proposition, such a proof is impossible. But here again the answer to the question is supplied by considering the character of the miracle. It was a manifestation of Divine mercy triumphing over evil, breaking through the barriers which shut in mere human effort, and so coming to the relief of human need. A limitless control over the forces of nature in the exercise of infinite beneficence is the most Divine characteristic which our minds can conceive; and it was because the miracles of our Lord displayed this characteristic that they carried conviction to the minds and hearts of men. The accounts which the Gospels give us of His miraculous activity are essentially of this nature. Therefore it was that His works were truly "signs." They pointed to Him as one exercising a Divine authority, fulfilling a Divine mission. That the power of God was working in Him and with Him was the very least inference which could be drawn from the facts which His ministry exhibited.

It is therefore clear that, apart from the miraculous element in the life of Christ, the Christian Faith would have been impossible. St. Paul tells us (Rom. i. 4) that

our Lord was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead." The resurrection was the crowning miracle which completed the revelation of Divine power and goodness in Jesus Christ. Here was sovereign power breaking through the barriers of ordinary experience in order to give to men the gift and assurance of salvation. It was the culmination of the whole miraculous manifestation which characterised the life of Jesus Christ. By the fact of the resurrection the Christian Faith and the Christian Church were established. Can we imagine that the great result could ever have come about otherwise?

When the Christian consciousness turned back upon the facts of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, it was led to certain great convictions. We can follow the process in its earlier stages in the New Testament. From experience of what Jesus said, did, taught, and suffered, there sprang the belief in Him as the Incarnate Son of God who overcame the power of evil and gave to men all those great gifts which are summed up under the term "Salvation," who is all through the ages a living, Divine Saviour, and who will finally prevail over all opposing forces, and bestow upon His followers a blessed immortality in a life belonging to a higher realm of being. Such a faith as this may be called supernatural. Its character corresponds exactly to the miraculous history of the Gospels. It arose out of that history, and unless it is wholly changed it must remain true to the source from which it came. If the natural be a name for the facts and laws of our ordinary experience, and the supernatural a name for facts and laws which belong to a higher order of things, this faith may truly be said to be supernatural. And the claim of Christianity has always been that it does speak to us of something higher than our ordinary experience. It has to do with the heavenly things, and it everywhere supposes the existence of those heavenly things. (See John iii. 12; Eph. i. 2, &c.) Moreover its value for our life on earth is derived mainly from the fact that it brings that life into relation with the heavenly things.

CHAPTER II

MIRACLES

In view of the conclusion at which we have arrived, it is alarming to find within the Church a tendency to minimise or explain away the miraculous elements in the traditional creed of Christianity. While it is perfectly true that the old faith has held its own, and has always been able to renew its vigour by a reassertion of its essential character, it is also true that the temptations created by the influences of the age are too strong for many individuals. It is not unusual to find, in recent theological works, the assertion that the question of miracles has ceased to be troublesome—that so many facts revealing the power of mind over matter and of mind upon mind have come to light that we should not rashly condemn all the miraculous accounts contained in the Gospels. Some of those accounts, it is added, are probably exaggerated; others are mistakes, or parables turned into history. The residuum is quite probable, and amounts indeed to little more than could be shown to have happened at Lourdes or under the influence of Christian Science. To this it is further added that the Resurrection narratives have certainly a basis in fact, and must be regarded as reminiscences of visions which many of the disciples experienced, and of which we have the type in St. Paul's account of his conversion. Whether these visions were subjective or not is a question on which opinion is divided.

The effect of all such explanations is, of course, to reduce miracles to the level of natural events of an unusual kind. They are instances of the working of certain laws of nature whose existence has not been hitherto suspected, and which

come into operation only under special conditions. But whenever these special conditions arise, these laws will certainly prevail and like effects will be observed. At present, great attention is being given to psychology, and we may hope that mental therapeutics will become a recognised branch of medical science. When this happens, the miracles of the Gospels—such of them as are really credible—may possibly be repeated.

Can such an apologetic as this be admitted? Is it really a defence of the Christian position, or is it a surrender?

In the first place, we have to remember that it was not our Lord's way to make use of miracle where ordinary agencies were available. If there are forces of mind and of will which can cure disease and restore disordered intelligences, can we doubt that He would make use of them? If there are spiritual powers inherent in a personality of sufficient magnitude which can direct physical forces by some inner compulsion, why should we hesitate to believe that He employed them? As He used the powers of eye and of ear, of hand and foot, for their proper purposes, so would He use all natural powers which were inherent in the mental and bodily organisation which was naturally His. It is clear, therefore, that we must not deny that some of the phenomena which have recently come to light, pointing, as they do, to powers of mind over matter which have not been recognised by science hitherto, have a real value for Christian apologetics. On the other hand, is it not equally clear that if, in order to bring the life of Christ into line with what we now know of the working of such forces, we minimise the miraculous element in the Gospel narrative, we are pulling down the mighty works to the level of everyday experiences and depriving them of all evidential value. What is essential to the function of miracles in the witness to the Divine mission of the Christ is, not that they should be shown to be in every instance an employment of superhuman powers, but that they should have the stamp of superhuman authority. The Gospels show us, and intend to show us, Jesus of Nazareth moving freely in regions of beneficent activity where unassisted man cannot move at

all. They also show us, and here again with intention, the same Jesus commanding with absolute certainty forces which others can use but tentatively, or only by special reliance upon His assistance. In the New Testament, He appears as one possessing a limitless power over the forces of nature—a power in the highest degree beneficent—and therefore He is, in contrast to all others, the Lord. How constantly the recognition of this Divine authority is conveyed to us by the Evangelists! The cry, "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean," is met at once by the response "I will, be thou made clean." (Mark i. 40, 41; Luke v. 12, 13.) It was this recognition by the centurion which called forth the strongest approval of all: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel"; for what is peculiar in the centurion's case is the fact that he discerned the boundless authority of the Lord.

Most writers who explain our Lord's miracles as instances of mind-cure, of the sort now become familiar, take refuge in vague generalities.[1] A careful and detailed examination of the subject by a competent medical authority has appeared in the *Hibbert Journal*.[2] Dr. Ryle points out that none of the critics who have adopted the neurotic theory of the miracles of healing have made any attempt to carry it out in detail. Instead of this, we are offered a number of quite commonplace allusions to the power of mind over body. "But we do not find any recognition of the fact that only a small portion of the diseases to which human flesh is heir are nervous diseases; and that of nervous

[1] Even Dr. Du Bose is satisfied with vague generalities as to "psychic and spiritual forces as yet latent in human nature of which we know not whereunto the future development may reach," in his endeavour to justify the miraculous element in our Lord's life to the thought of the present day. Yet it is hard to see how this is consistent with the perfectly just statement that, with our Lord, "the power to heal sickness is but proof of the power to heal sin." If the miraculous element is indeed a proof of this kind, it must be contrasted with, and not similar to, such powers of healing as may be "latent in human nature." See *The Gospel in the Gospels*, Chapter vi.

[2] *The Neurotic Theory of the Miracles of Healing*, by R. J. Ryle, M.A., M.D., in *Hibbert Journal* for April 1907 (Vol. V. No. 3).

diseases, again, only a very small and unimportant group admit of cure in this way." In a brief but careful examination of the narratives of cures given in the Gospels, Dr. Ryle shows that the great majority of the cases described are not instances of diseases which can be cured by "moral impression." Even the nervous disorders which are mentioned are not susceptible of healing in this way. The demoniacs described are "the subjects which lend themselves least of all to the modern remedial measures of hypnotism and suggestion." Similarly the paralytics are, so far as can be judged, of that more numerous class in which the loss of power arises from organic disease and not from hysteria. Paralysis of this kind cannot be cured by emotional shock. It is not susceptible of faith-cure. The general conclusion, therefore, is that the attempt to explain the Gospel miracles as instances of faith-healing, or mind-cure, of the kind which has attracted attention in recent times, completely breaks down. The extraordinary abundance of detail supplied by the Gospels, the simplicity and actuality of the narrative, the impossibility of separating the miraculous element from the rest of the history, the fact that many of our Lord's most characteristic utterances arise directly out of the circumstances of His mighty works; all these considerations conspire to produce a mass of evidence which modern criticism of the saner type has found to be irresistible. It is now admitted, even by strongly negative critics, that the "healing ministry, judged by critical tests, stands on as firm historical ground as the best accredited parts of the teachings."[1] This being so, Dr. Ryle urges, with great force, that "the partisans of a more conservative position may very fairly demand that the attempt to draw arbitrary lines of distinction between one kind of mighty work and another shall be given up."

Dr. Sanday, in an interesting chapter in a recently published volume,[2] examines the question of miracle from a philosophical point of view, and with reference to recent criticism. As a critic he seems prepared to reduce the

[1] *Encyclopædia Biblica*. Art. *Jesus*, § 19.
[2] *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, Chap. viii.

miraculous element in the New Testament in a very great degree, and as a philosopher he endeavours to restore our faith by two considerations. First, he believes in answers to prayer. Our own experience teaches us the frequency of such answers. They occur in the providence of God and without any breach of the laws of nature. They teach us that the Power behind the universe is in touch with human souls. Secondly, Dr. Sanday quotes St. Augustine in order to introduce the idea that our recognition of miracle is relative to what we know of the laws of nature. Things which seemed miraculous to an earlier age are discerned as instances of natural law in the light of modern knowledge. Here Dr. Sanday believes that faith-healing and "Christian Science" help us to see that "the latent powers of personality and human will are very great and very elastic—great and elastic beyond the measure of ordinary experience." Even the wonders of the telephone and of wireless telegraphy seem to him instances of things which would be miraculous to a less instructed public. They show that all is not irregular which seems irregular. The "broad conclusion" is that "the belief in miracle was relative to the age in which the miracles occurred, that it was an inevitable product of the culture and ideas of that age, that historically it served the purpose that it was intended to serve, but that it has come down to us with a different mental context, under different conditions, and so requires some corresponding modification of statement."

It is surely evident that Dr. Sanday's view is open to all the objections so clearly pointed out by Dr. Ryle. Dr. Sanday is at pains to explain away all that he can of the miraculous element in St. Paul's Epistles and in the travel-diary in the Acts. He minimises the corresponding element in the Gospels on the ground that none of the evidence which they supply is quite first-rate. He is ready to accept a great deal of the miraculous healing on the ground that modern faith-healing has done some wonderful things. Finally, he points out the distinction which is often made "between miracles wrought upon conscious beings and acting (it may be presumed) through their con-

sciousness, and others that are alleged to have been wrought upon inanimate nature;" and admits that no such distinction was "present to the mind of the biblical historians, and that miracles of the one class are not inferior in attestation to those of the other." "This latter class of miracles constitutes," he declares, "perhaps one of the obscurest corners of the subject."

Here is all the vagueness and uncertainty and the drawing of arbitrary lines of distinction between different classes of miracles, which Dr. Ryle points out as characteristic of so many recent critics. And surely it is clear that, if our Lord's miracles were miracles only because the people who observed them lacked the scientific instruction which makes the modern mind refer every unusual occurrence to some unknown natural law, they lose all the value which their author declared to belong to them. It does not show the possession of spiritual authority that a man should exhibit unusual or even unparalleled power to affect the nervous systems of other men. To think that it does is surely a mark of superstition. Can there be a deeper depth of superstition than that which takes the thaumaturge for a god? Our Lord's miracles, as recorded in the Gospels, have no affinity with the practices of the thaumaturge. They reveal Him as one possessing a boundless power over the forces of nature in the exercise of a perfect beneficence; and therefore they were a sign that He wielded Divine power and possessed Divine authority. Further, every miracle recorded in the Acts is a proof that we are right in thus concentrating attention on the miraculous element in the life of Jesus; for every one of these miracles is represented as either wrought in the name of Jesus or as being in some way or other a witness to Him. They are indeed His works wrought through the instrumentality of others.

Dr. Sanday, in bringing in the idea of answers to prayer as they occur in the ordinary experience of the Christian life, raises a very interesting question. Are miracles and answers to prayer to be placed in the same category? We think of an answer to prayer as something which

comes most truly in response to our petition, yet in a way which we think of as the ordinary providence of God—in a way, that is, which does not involve any dislocation of the order of natural events. To most theological thinkers nowadays, miracles also appear as occurrences which involve no breach of the natural order—at least no violation of the laws of nature. How, then, can we distinguish the two kinds of events? The question is one of great importance. It raises, in a very acute form, the problem of the relation of the Divine Will to the laws of nature. This problem is one which would lead us far beyond the limits to which the present discussion can extend. To deal with it with any fulness here would be impossible. But we can see enough to show us that many of the difficulties which occur to our minds are not as perplexing as they seem, and also we can understand to some degree wherein miracles differ from answers to prayer.

The relation of will to natural law is one of the most puzzling questions in the whole realm of philosophical thought; but fortunately it is not necessary for us to solve it in order to deal with the problem before us; for we can reason from what we find in our own experience to what belongs to higher things. Man possesses intelligence and will, and through these possessions he is able to control natural forces and use them for his own purposes. This control of natural forces does not involve any violation of natural law, yet it enables man to produce results which the course of nature could never effect unassisted by human effort. So far from there being an antagonism between this controlling will and the laws of nature, it is the very inflexibility of these laws which enables man to subordinate them to his own purposes. If nature were capricious, if it were wholly unaccountable, so that it would never be possible to tell beforehand what effect would follow any cause, intelligent effort would be impossible. It is therefore the very fact that natural law is unfailing in its operation which makes man's work effective. Learning by his intelligence, then, the effects which natural causes produce—the laws, that is, under which they operate—man combines them

so as to bring about the results which he desires. Thus it is that he can counteract the greatest of natural forces and perform prodigies which seem to the uninstructed to involve the subversion of the settled order of the universe. He can rise in air in opposition to the force of gravitation, he can speak to a friend miles away, he can send his messages round the globe. And all this in obedience to law, and not in violation of it.

Now, are we to suppose that the Infinite Spirit is more limited in His relation to the universe than the finite, that He labours under a disability from which His creature man is free? Surely His relation to the universe is infinitely more various and more intimate. We touch the world in a manner which is very restricted, very external. He touches every atom of it from within.[1]

Against this, it may appear that science has revealed to us a settled order in the universe which we must take to be the expression of the mind and will of God as regards the physical world. Cause produces its appropriate effect in accordance with its nature, and we do not see anything which leads us to think that a great Intelligence is engaged in the task of combining natural forces so as to produce results different from what would take place if these forces were left to themselves. But the argument here endeavours to find God too low down in the succession of events. We must remember that He is absolutely First, that the inmost life of everything is His. It is therefore quite absurd to suppose that the Divine control of natural law takes place so near the surface of things as to come under our observation. The human analogy leads us simply to this, that if it be true that man can effect his own purposes in the world without any breach of natural law—that he can subordinate the physical order to higher purposes without violation of that order—how much more must we believe can the Infinite Spirit, who is the inner life and cause of all things, respond to all the needs of His spiritual creatures without violation of that universal order which He has Himself ordained.

[1] See Lotze, *Microcosmus*, Bk. IV. Chap. III. § 2.

The confusion of thought which exists on this question is very largely due to the fact that, when we think of science in general, and the lessons about the universe which we have learned from it, we consider only one branch of it. We may divide scientific activities into two branches. There is the science which seeks to understand the material world, its laws and processes; and there is the science which seeks to control material forces and bend them to human purposes. These two kinds of science are, of course, closely connected. The latter depends upon the former: we must know something of the laws of nature before we can bend them to our purposes. The former is pure science, the latter is applied science. The former corresponds to intellect, the latter very largely to will.

As a rule, when people begin to reflect upon the teachings of science they think only of pure science, and picture to themselves the whole world as a system of laws controlling all events, and absolutely exclusive of human or personal intervention of any kind; and they forget that if this were its character their own life would be impossible. It is no wonder that such a view seems to shut out Divine Providence.

Let those who have such thoughts in their minds consider science in a larger way, and they will find the solution of the problem. The answer to the question, "What are the laws of nature?" is only one half of science. The other half is the answer to the question, "How are these laws to be controlled for the benefit of men? how are they to be subordinated to certain definite human purposes?" We saw above that, just because of their unbending character, the laws of nature can be so subordinated. In fact, it might be reasonably argued, from a wide survey of human activity in its dealing with natural forces, that it belongs to their original constitution to be so subordinated, that they were made to be the servants of Spirit. And are we to suppose that the very characteristics which make the laws and forces of nature obedient in so large a degree to human will render them independent of the Divine?

It is only reasonable, then, to regard every response of

the Divine Will to human need as taking place in complete accordance with the laws of nature, and as all the more perfect in its adaptation to human need because of this harmony.

How, then, are we to distinguish miracles from answers to prayer? The reply to this question is now surely evident. God's Providence is active equally in both, but in answer to prayer it operates secretly, in the inmost heart of things, producing results which are as obviously natural as the falling of the leaf or the flowing of the river, and yet which are the perfect response to human need as God knows it to be. The miracle, on the other hand, is an act of Providence in which the Divine element is made startlingly manifest in order to arrest attention. It is for a sign. Its purpose is revelation. It is indeed an act of revelation. Therefore miracles are exceptional. They do not belong to the regular course of history. They do not happen—as was most truly but irrelevantly said by Matthew Arnold. If they did happen as part of the ordinary course of human experience, they would cease to be miracles. They would lose their evidential value. But their occurrence at the great central epoch of history as part of the revelation of God in Christ is altogether in accordance with the fitness of things and with the needs of humanity.

It is perhaps possible by means of an illustration to make the distinction which has just been drawn more evident. Imagine the safety of a city imperilled by the fall of a spark into a powder magazine. Imagine a superhuman intelligence, aware of all the circumstances, determined to save the city from destruction. How will he proceed? If his purpose be simply to save and not at all to reach the minds of the people by his action, he will quench the spark as it descends. The city will be saved, and none will know the danger which was averted. On the other hand, if his purpose be to impress the imagination of the people, he will allow the explosion to take place, but will so suppress or direct the vast eruptive forces when they have been let loose that no life shall be lost. In the one

case the intervention takes place so far back in the chain of causation that none can detect it. In the other, it takes place at a point, and in a way, which make the fact of the intervention evident, and so attract attention and strike the imagination. The former corresponds to an answer to prayer, the latter to a miracle. The former seems to human thought the most perfectly natural thing; the latter earns the name of supernatural. Yet, in the higher sense, both the answer to prayer and the miracle are natural, for both belong equally to that Providence which controls every atom of the universe from within, which shapes the forms of living organisms, guides the processes of history, deals with the infinite variety of human experience, answers the prayers of the faithful, and in all its activities brings in the Kingdom of God.

And yet we have reached a conception of the supernatural, for just as the will of man supervenes upon the course of nature and subordinates natural law to human purpose, and as moral law belongs to an order of being higher than natural law, so we must think of the will of God controlling the laws of His physical universe with a view to His eternal purposes. Any action or revelation which expresses this higher side of the Divine activity may reasonably be described as supernatural.

CHAPTER III

THE INCARNATION

We have seen that Christianity is essentially a supernatural religion—that it is the most supernatural of all religions. We have also seen that there is no contradiction between the natural and the supernatural. It is not necessary to suppose that the existence or occurrence of the supernatural involves in any case the breach of natural law.

But it is not our purpose to pursue further this well-trodden path, nor to examine any of the intricate philosophical questions to which it leads. Far more important is it to view the actual contents of the Christian religion in relation to the needs of humanity. While earnest efforts are being made to commend these contents to the modern mind by rationalising them, it is surely worth while asking the question, What will their value be when the process is complete? A serious examination will show that it is just because the Christian creed leads us beyond the natural, and sets us face to face with facts and principles which are outside the range of the scientific intelligence, that it satisfies our spiritual needs. What heart and mind require above all else in religion is the supernatural.

First among those great leading elements of the faith which we have to consider is the Incarnation. In the sphere of Christian thought our age has been remarkable for the emphasis which has been laid on this great doctrine. In viewing it theology has returned very nearly to the standpoint of the great Alexandrian thinkers, and has regarded the Incarnation as a unifying principle, a supreme category, by means of which the whole history of creation and the vast drama of human life may be subsumed beneath

the leading idea of the Christian revelation. How much we owe to the teaching of the late Bishop Westcott for the development of this glorious Christian philosophy is known to all students. By means of it many have been able to attain conceptions which have brought into one grand harmony thought, religion, and the life of practical effort. It has been at once a source of illumination for the philosophic thinker and for the social reformer. If we give to the word "reason" that more exalted signification with which some philosophies have endowed it, here is a noble rationalism for which the Christian believer may be sincerely thankful.

But every Christian is well aware that the Incarnation is more than a philosophical principle. If it were only this, then it would, in the religious and moral sphere, be a vague ideal—vague because devoid of definite contents. Its meaning would be that, in the process of creation, God is incarnating Himself, and that the higher the development, the more of the Divine. But who is to define the limit? How is the character of the final result to be known? Why should man be more than a stage in an infinite process, the ultimate meaning of which may be as remote from his nature as he is from the *amœba?*

The truth is that the Incarnation as a philosophical principle is practically valueless apart from the Incarnation as a definite event in history. It is our faith in the historical Christ as Incarnate God which gives to the principle of the Incarnation all its illuminating power. Even from the philosophical point of view this is the case, because in Him we have the ideal itself manifested. Here is the end of the great process revealed, so far as it can be revealed under the conditions which prevail in this imperfect world. Accept Jesus Christ as the Divine Lord, and there can be no longer any doubt as to the nature and tendency of the whole vast movement which is taking place throughout the ages. Thus we see that the mere idea of Incarnation as a principle, apart from the supernatural event, affords neither comfort for the heart nor satisfaction to the intellect.

But leaving purely philosophical considerations, let us

think of the Incarnation as a concrete fact in relation to religious experience. One result of the sustained criticism to which the Bible and Christian doctrine have been subjected in recent times is that on all sides attention is being concentrated on the Person of our Lord, His life and teaching, His death and resurrection. It is being realised more and more fully that here is the central truth of Christianity, however it is to be interpreted. Two elements of our Lord's personality are being revealed with special clearness: His consciousness of Himself, first, as standing in unique relation to God; and, secondly, as standing in unique relation to man. Our Lord knew Himself to be the Son of God as well as the Son of man; and He claimed as His right all the homage and devotion of which the human heart is capable. No sane criticism of the Gospels can now deny this. The work of Harnack and others of his school, far from orthodoxy though they are, has but placed the truth in a position of greater prominence.

Does it not seem as if God were teaching His Church once more, and this time by the hard discipline of intellectual struggle, that in Christ Himself is the supreme revelation of the truth and the supreme object of faith? Though we know this in words, and recognise that it has always been by a return to Christ Himself that Christianity has renewed its life, how easy it is to drift away from it!

How else but in a person could God be revealed in a way which can satisfy heart as well as mind? To know God by science is impossible, for science deals with abstractions, and God is the most concrete of all beings. To know a human person it is necessary to have experience. Not by intellect alone, but by character, will, emotions, affections, does one human soul come into such a relation to another that there springs into being a knowledge (as we call it) which can justify a complete confidence. Such is the "knowledge" which we have of those whose friendship or love is the most valuable of our human possessions. And can the revelation of God to the soul be less full, less concrete, than the revelation of one human soul to another? If God is to manifest

Himself at all, how can it be but in a supreme personality? And such has Jesus Christ been to human hearts. In the complete correspondence between His life and His teaching, in the clearness and certainty with which He utters the deep things of the heart of God, in the penetration with which He scans all the secrets of our human nature, in the perfect sanity of His judgments and the greatness of His claims, in the sternness of His righteousness and the boundlessness of His Love, in His life of self-sacrifice, we discern a character which surpasses all that we can, apart from this revelation, conceive of Divine perfection.

Further, it is only when the Divine is presented in this form that it is able to draw forth, in the highest degree, the faith, devotion, and love of the human heart.

If this view be correct, we ought to be able to bring it to the test of a practical verification. We are now dealing with a principle which must show itself, if it be really operative, in the history of religious experience. A few examples out of many must suffice. The testimony of the first age of Christian history is clear. To St. Paul the personal influence of Jesus Christ was the strongest factor in life. "Who," he cries, "shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And again: "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord," and "I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day." St. Peter is equally clear: "Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory." So also is St. John, with his insistence upon the blessedness of "abiding in Him." It would be possible to multiply such passages almost indefinitely from the later books of the New Testament. They prove conclusively that the personal influence of Jesus Christ was a more powerful factor in human life after His departure from the world than it had been during the period of His ministry. Instead of mourning the loss of

their Master, we find these men from whom He had been taken rejoicing in the consciousness that His power rests upon them, and that they are living in union with Him.

And this is not peculiar to primitive Christianity. All along the ages, when the faith is found in its purity, the same phenomenon repeats itself, the personal influence of the Lord is felt; the promise is fulfilled, "Lo, I am with you always." With splendid confidence Athanasius appeals to this fact as a thing which cannot be questioned, comparing the influence of Christ with that of others who have passed from earth: "When a man is dead he can exert no power, his influence lasts to the grave and then ceases. Actions and power over men belong to the living only. Then let him who will, see, and judge from what his eyes behold. For the Saviour is working great things among men. Every day He is invisibly persuading a great multitude from every quarter, both Greeks and foreigners, to come over to His faith and to obey His teaching. Will any one still be in doubt whether the resurrection has been accomplished by the Saviour, and whether Christ be alive, or rather be Himself the Life? . . . or how, if He be not active (for that is the peculiarity of the dead) does He restrain from their activity those who are active and living, so that the impure man is no longer impure, the homicide slays no more, the unrighteous is no longer covetous, the profane is henceforth religious? . . . This is not the work of the dead, but of the living, and especially of God."[1]

These words contain a magnificent argument, and one which is as fresh and as true to-day as it was in the fourth century; for to-day, as of old, wherever there is a rekindling of the fire of Christian faith, and hearts are stirred and lives renewed, the power which manifests itself is the influence of the living Saviour.

And when, with this practical verification in human experience fresh in our minds, we turn back to the revelation of our Lord's character as it is given in the Gospels, the effect is extraordinary; we detect the universality of His

[1] Athanasius, "De Incarnatione," xxx.

personality. Set in circumstances which belonged to a particular country and a long past age, He yet belongs to all countries and all ages. All the great human characteristics are His, and all in perfection. Even those which are most strongly contrasted, and which beforehand would seem to be wholly incompatible, combine freely and harmoniously in Him.

This union of opposite qualities has often been observed, but its importance in connection with the subject before us is so great that we must consider it further. Only by grasping the wideness of its range do we gain a view of the comprehensiveness of our Lord's humanity. In Him we find the greatest degree of lowliness and loftiness, simplicity and nobility, tenderness and strength, meekness and passionateness, self-renunciation and self-assertion, the most perfect love and the most unsparing justice, the greatest moral sweetness and the greatest moral indignation, the widest charity and the most uncompromising moral decision, the most perfect candour and the most perfect sympathy, the keenest insight into the frailty of the human heart and unfailing readiness to make allowance for human weakness and to help the fallen, hating the sin but loving the sinner. Shaken by His perfect consciousness of the appalling difficulties of the work which lay before Him, our Lord yet went forward with unflinching determination to do the will of His Father. Our Lord's sinlessness appears clearly in the Gospel history ; but, after all, the splendour of His moral nature can only be seen aright when it is viewed from the positive side. Nor, indeed, can it be properly apprehended until we behold Him living and working among men. In the story of His life the great qualities which have been mentioned can be seen, not in abstraction, but concretely, as aspects of Himself. Then we realise, to some degree, the miracle of His personality—as we watch Him hungering, thirsting, toiling in His simple human life, entering into all the ordinary experiences of men, drawing the imagery of His Divine teaching from the elemental facts of human existence, delighting to withdraw Himself from time to time

into the solitudes of Nature, with an eye which observes the glory of the sky and the beauty of the lily, and yet responds to every glance of faith, or detects every movement towards or from the good among those who come within His influence. The universality of His humanity can also be seen in the way in which He received all kinds and classes of people—the poor, the sick, the sorrowing, the afflicted, little children, publicans and sinners, the religious when they were sincere, the rich and great when they came in earnestness and simplicity. In His presence the secret of every heart came to light, every imposture was detected. His dealing with the individual soul was always based on a perfect knowledge of its needs. No two cases among all those given in the Gospels are alike. Our Lord's treatment was infinitely various, as various as the moral attitudes and situations of men. To meet with Christ was, in each instance, a great crisis for the soul.

Now, perhaps the most wonderful thing of all is that when we pursue such a line of investigation as this we find ourselves passing insensibly from the human Christ to the Divine Christ. It is quite impossible to draw a line and say, "Here the human ends and the Divine begins." In fact, the more we set ourselves to draw a complete portrait of the Man Christ Jesus, the more certainly do we find ourselves in the end face to face with one who may justly be described as the noblest image of Deity that our minds can conceive. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to start with some *a priori* principle of selection, by which the scope of the inquiry is limited and certain elements of the Gospel history are rejected. But not one of the many efforts which have been made to do this have proved satisfactory, though some have been the works of brilliant genius, and others of men of the most painstaking character and with the most elaborate equipment of critical science. The whole history of German criticism of the Gospels is a detailed proof of this statement. From Strauss to Harnack, Von Soden, and Bousset there is a steady advance, the unity of our Lord's character asserting

itself against one critical prepossession after another. And now the case stands thus, that all we need ask is that the critics should draw the appropriate conclusion.[1]

Here we have the fact of the Incarnation displaying itself before our eyes. A humanity so exalted and so full-orbed that through it we gain the greatest conception of Divinity of which our minds are capable, and a personality so mighty that it is to-day, as it has been in all the Christian centuries, the strongest of all forces for spiritual regeneration, moral conquest, and social reformation—this is the Christ as the experience of our own time reveals Him. Here the Divine and the human are united for the salvation of man. In what other form, we may well ask, could the Incarnation be presented to us as a factor in the life of mankind?

But the process we have described cannot stop when the unity of the wonderful character has asserted itself. Inextricably involved in all that reveals that character are the physical miracles which fill the pages of the Gospels. Every miracle is an act of revelation. Many of the most characteristic of our Lord's utterances are based upon miracles, and would lose their place in His life and their connection with His other teachings if their miraculous foundations were removed.

How close again (as pointed out by Athanasius) is the connection between the Resurrection (with its completion, the Ascension) and that working among men of the personal influence of the living, though invisible, Saviour, which has been the motive force of Christianity in all ages of its history! And how clearly does this connection appear in the Acts of the Apostles! The Apostles who, before the resurrection, had been weak in faith, uncertain, failing to grasp their Master's meaning, clinging to their old earthly conceptions of His kingdom, cowering before the power and authority of His opponents, overwhelmed by the catastrophe of His death, suddenly appear, armed with invincible faith, confident in the belief that the power of

[1] See Sanday, *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, Chaps. ii., iii., iv., v.

their Divine Master is with them, facing with fearless courage the very authorities before whom they formerly quailed. Nor is this the fiction of a later age, for the rapid rise of the Church can be explained on no other hypothesis. Christ risen from the dead, and exerting by His Spirit a new power in the world, is the only adequate explanation.

The object of recurring to this familiar line of thought is to show that to the unity of our Lord's Divine-human personality there corresponds the unity of His Divine-human history. From the miraculous birth to the miraculous mission of the Apostles all is harmonious.

Surely it is obvious that this is the Christ that satisfies the needs of the human heart, that gives power for spiritual renewal, and imparts in all ages zeal and energy to those who labour best and most for the welfare of their fellow-men.

And, further, the modern world, in spite of all its doubts and denials, owes more than it imagines to the Divine-human Christ. If in these days we depended solely upon the teaching of science for our religious conceptions we should be miserable indeed. Apart from traditional beliefs and ethical considerations of a kind that mere science cannot justify, there is nothing so hard to maintain nowadays as a pure Theism. Agnosticism, or a species of Monism which regards the supreme power of the universe as something alien to man and regardless of him—a power which, if we are to attribute to it any purpose, is working towards some end very remote from man's life—seems to be the creed to which science is leading those who take her for their only guide. We must believe that this is a passing phase of thought; but, while it lasts, what would become of the world were it not for the influence of Jesus Christ? Across the long centuries He speaks to us of the Father, and manifests Himself as the expression of the Father's heart. He tells us things so great and so precious that, when we have discovered their value, we cannot live without them. While science has been speaking of the grim struggle for existence, an agelong welter of greed and

pain, out of which all that we call progress emerges, Christ has been telling us that underneath are the everlasting arms, and over all the eternal love. It is a supernatural message, yet it is the message without which all that we now know of the natural world would drive us to despair.

CHAPTER IV

THE INCARNATION AS AN EVENT

We have heard a great deal in recent times about the Incarnation as a principle, very little about it as an event. The modes of thinking which are at present in fashion are hostile to events and very much devoted to slow processes. The conception of evolution has given us the great idea of the continuity of nature. It has become an axiom that in the natural process there are no cataclysms. Progress is made by the integration of minute differences. From the dim beginnings of orderly movement in some primeval star-mist to the great system revealed by modern astronomy, and from the appearance of the first specks of living protoplasm up to Shakespeare and Newton, there has been (it would appear) no break in the chain of gradual development. It is certainly on the principle of continuity that science has been doing her wonderful work and producing her wonderful results.

If all this be admitted, how can we believe in the advent of the Incarnate Son of God? Is it not much more reasonable to suppose that Jesus of Nazareth was but the greatest and most original of men, and that the extraordinary nature of His history and of His character as presented in the Gospels is due to the idealising thoughts of those who told the story of His life? The mist of holy romance which surrounded Him created a celestial halo for those who viewed His sacred figure through the space which separated His life on earth from the period of apostolic activity.

It is very easy to pacify the intelligence with vague statements of this sort when no effort is made to deal in

detail with the actual facts. But, as we saw in the last chapter, no such explanation is possible. The picture of the Christ as drawn in the Gospels is one of extraordinary vividness and power. It possesses a unity which combines the most diverse elements of character and situation into a perfect whole. It depicts a humanity so perfect that it becomes superhuman. The figure of the Christ rises to so high a moral altitude above even the greatest of His followers that there is no possible comparison. It is the same in the simple story of the Synoptics as in the highly theological Gospel of St. John. The accent of authority with which He always speaks corresponds exactly with the supreme dignity of His character. The unparalleled insight into Divine things, and the consciousness of the mind and heart of God, which He displays, are in perfect harmony with His personality. That such a result as this could be due to the existence of some unusual dramatic instinct or idealising tendency among certain Jews of the first century is impossible. It is there simply because it is true. There can be no other explanation.

When this fact is taken in conjunction with the miraculous occurrences which the Gospels record and which, as we have seen, are equally convincing to an unprejudiced judgment, there is surely ample evidence that, at the Christian era, there took place an event which cannot be estimated by the ordinary rules of historical inquiry. Here we discern a great turning-point, a "new beginning" in history.

When the principle of the continuity of nature first took hold of the modern mind, and theologians, being at the time very much under the influence of the idea of Divine transcendence, were impressed with the belief that this new thought meant a denial of the creative activity of God, it seemed as if the only hope of the believer lay in the discovery of certain great epochs, "new beginnings," in the course of development. At that time great emphasis was laid upon the fact that there must have been turning-points in the history of creation when new principles began to operate. It was pointed out, and insisted on with great urgency, that there was needed some primitive impulse to

set in motion the dynamic activity of the material universe, that all available evidence went to prove that life when it appeared on the earth must have been a new creation, that intelligence and moral capacity could not arise out of mere mechanical or vegetative processes. Here, it was said, in these "new beginnings," we have signal proof of the action of a Creator.

It generally happens that, when one side of truth is exclusively emphasised, the opposite side very soon asserts itself in an equally exclusive manner. It soon appeared that to confine Divine creative activity to these rare and special turning-points implied a denial of it in the regular course of nature. But, to religious faith, God is at work everywhere. His hand must be traced in the ordinary succession of events as well as in extraordinary occurrences. Also Holy Scripture asserts and implies the universal activity of God. And so there came to the front once more, and as though it were a new revelation, the splendid conception of the Immanence of God. As we saw above,[1] the unfailing character of natural law does not conflict with the fact that nature is the work of God. On the contrary, we discern here a new testimony to the trustworthiness of the Almighty. One of the most Divine of attributes is thus manifested. When, in addition to this, we think of the slow progression of the ages working out the Divine purpose, we gain a new insight into the character of God. We learn the patience and certainty of His work. When rightly regarded, all the new light which science has thrown upon the processes of nature reveals afresh the greatness and glory of the Creator.

But does it follow, because we have thus come to think of God as the Indwelling Spirit of the Universe, and have learned these great lessons about Him, that we are to ignore the other side, if there be another side? Surely not. When we accept all the teachings which science, in the widest sense of the term, has to give us, we find that we must believe in the transcendence as well as in the immanence of God: we must think of Him as the Indwelling Spirit guiding the course of nature in its continual

[1] See pp. 6, 17, 18.

evolution, and we must also think of Him as the Supreme Being who stands above the Universe. Even in man there is something of this double nature; for the spirit of man dwells in his experience and so that experience develops from its lower stages to the higher; and also man stands above and apart from nature, and through his intelligence and will can intervene in the course of nature and bend natural forces to his own purposes. If God were only immanent, and not also transcendent, He would be imprisoned in nature and so far be inferior to man. As in dealing with miracles and answers to prayer we found the human analogy to teach us the absurdity of supposing that the Deity is less free in relation to natural causes than man, so here we cannot suppose man to be able to lift himself above the course of evolution and to disentangle himself from the bonds of physical causation to a greater degree than the Almighty. Man's transcendence of nature must be derivative—a gift from Him whose essence it is to be above all.

As to how this Divine transcendence must show itself, it is not for us to say. All we can do is to scan the history of creation, and guide ourselves humbly by what we can thus learn of God's dealing with His creatures.

When we ask ourselves the question, Are there any evidences of a transcendent Divine activity in the universe, an activity which supervenes upon the regular course of events and gives it a direction towards higher things? the reply to-day must be what it was thirty years ago. There certainly are such evidences. There is nothing to show that science is now any nearer than she was then to finding a way from chaos to cosmos, from inorganic matter to organic tissue, from organic tissue to sensation, from sensation to intelligence and moral faculty. The origins of motion, of life, of feeling, of personality, remain unexplained. This does not mean, of course, that these things came into the universe as alien and disconnected elements. On the contrary, for each, when it appeared, a suitable home had been already prepared. All that went before was indeed a preparation, and the fact that it was so is a

proof that the Indwelling Spirit who shapes the course of the universal process is One with the Transcendent Deity whose power is revealed in the action by which the new element is introduced. It is commonly thought that, if it could be shown that whenever certain material conditions occur life makes its appearance, it would follow that there is at this point no introduction of a new element, no "new beginning" in creation. What has been called "Spontaneous generation," it is imagined, would dispose altogether of the theory of the "new beginning." But, unless the vital process itself were at the same time explained in terms of chemistry, this is altogether a mistake. For the vital process remains a thing different in kind from the processes which went before, and the fact of its beginning whenever certain conditions were produced would mean simply this, that the Power which is the true source of life is constant in His operation. It is surely extremely probable that this is so. All the same, it appears that the problem remains exactly where it was thirty years ago.

There is therefore abundant evidence in our experience of natural processes to show the fact of a transcendent operation of the Almighty in the universe as well as an immanent activity. We learn how, through long periods, a slow process of preparation took place until at last, in the fulness of time, a new element appeared. Thus the cooling of the earth, the precipitation of water upon its surface, the formation of its atmosphere, &c., were the preparation for the introduction of the principle of life; the vast development of life in its lower forms, vegetable and animal, and the great series of geological changes on the surface of the globe, were the preparation for the introduction of intelligence and moral faculty—of personality—and finally, the long course of human history leading to the thought of Greece, the authority of Rome, the religious genius of Israel, was the preparation for the coming of the Christ.

It is therefore impossible to say that there is anything inconsistent with what we know of the course of Nature, and of God's way of dealing with creation, in the advent

of the Incarnate Word at the greatest epoch in the whole history of the universe.

Only one objection of any weight has been made against this argument. It has been said that in the case of other "new beginnings," the first step was a minute difference, and great results were brought about by development from this smallest possible introduction of the new principle, and that this method is quite different from that involved in the advent of the Incarnate Word, the sudden introduction into this world of one whose being and nature are infinitely exalted above those of ordinary men.

But every principle must follow its own nature. Life can enter the world as a speck of protoplasm: a person cannot enter the world except in the fulness of personality. And yet is it not true that the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation? Our Lord Himself compared its first stage to the grain of mustard seed. In all the circumstances of His life He "humbled Himself." So far as was consistent with the fulfilment of His mission, He "emptied Himself." For those who view the subject from the Christian side, it is absolutely clear that the advent of Christ was the smallest interference with the settled order of the world which was possible under the conditions essential to the case.

How can such a view as this of the Incarnation as an event be harmonised with the doctrine of the Incarnation as a principle running through all creation? According to this latter idea the whole process of the universe is a process of incarnation. The manifestation of the Divine under the conditions of space and time, and in the sphere of the human, was the purpose towards which all pointed from the very beginning. The Incarnation gives us the meaning of Creation. Thus God realises Himself. Therefore every true element in the whole process is an element in the Incarnation, and in this vast scheme perfected humanity is the final step. Humanity reaches its perfection when it becomes the manifestation of Divinity, and when this has taken place there is available a regenerating principle for the whole race, for the whole creation. It is a noble

scheme of thought, and forms a connecting link between the highest philosophy and the Christian religion. It is essentially a doctrine of Immanence. But the Incarnation regarded as an event taking place at a definite epoch in time involves a doctrine of Transcendence. It implies that God not only works within the cosmic process and so realises Himself, but also that, standing above His universe, He has so designed the whole scheme of things as to prepare the way for an epoch when He will supervene upon the cosmic process and so manifest Himself. The former by itself might simply mean that every man is an incarnation of the Divine and that the difference between the Christ and every other man is simply one of degree. The latter must find in Jesus the only true Incarnation of the Divine Logos. And this is the Christian doctrine.

Yet we are not to imagine that this Christian doctrine excludes from the Incarnation all the stages of creation which have led up to the Advent. Quite the contrary. St. Paul teaches us that it was the eternal purpose of God to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heaven and the things on earth. He also teaches that in Christ God included from the beginning those whom He purposed for Himself.

It is a scientific truth that every creature born into this world is a summary of all the stages in creation which have led up to it and contributed to its being. In the pre-natal months of its existence the developing organism passes through phases which correspond to all the lower forms of life which have prepared the way for it throughout the whole course of organic history. It would mean little to say of Christ that He so sums up all creation, if we thought of Him as simply the highest product of evolution. But it means everything if we find in Him the stream of evolution flowing not merely from God, but into God. It would mean little for us to have a share in the life of the immanent God, if we had not also a share in the life of the transcendent God. In the former case humanity might be but one stage—and a passing one—in an infinite process; in the latter man finds his end, his home, in Him

who is the end as well as the source of all things. As St. Paul puts it, Christ sums up not only the earthly things, but also the heavenly things.

We have now advanced a stage further towards our understanding of the place of the supernatural in theology. If the doctrine of Immanence were a full statement of the Divine relation to the universe, the supernatural would be altogether excluded, the natural process would be the full and only manifestation of the Divine. But when we believe also in the transcendent God who supervenes upon the natural course of things, and who, above all, manifests Himself at a definite epoch and in a historical Person, we adopt a doctrine which most certainly involves the supernatural. We have here the conception of the natural order of things which we know in our ordinary experience, and more accurately through the researches of science; and we assume also the existence of a higher, and transcendent, order, from which the Divine power stoops in order to supervene upon the lower.

There is here no supposition of one order being more than another the domain of law. To the thoughtful mind both realms will appear to be pervaded by laws which have their source in God. But the laws of the higher realm will seem to be of a higher order than those of the lower, just as in human experience the laws which guide conduct—moral laws—are essentially higher than the physical laws of cause and effect.

CHAPTER V

DIVINE IMMANENCE AND CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

RECENT controversies have conspired with certain tendencies of modern thought to concentrate attention on that conception which has just occupied so much of our attention, and which is called the Immanence of God. This conception is regarded by many as the means by which the doctrines of Christianity are to be reconciled with the monistic philosophy which is now fashionable. The idea is not new, for in the early centuries, in the schools of Alexandria, when Christian faith came into contact with Greek thought, a similar process of reconciliation took place by means of this very conception. The Logos doctrine which is found in the Gospel of St. John became the foundation of a great theology, in which the methods of Greek philosophy were applied to the systematic interpretation of the facts of the Christian revelation.

It must be granted that this conception of God as immanent must find a place in every system of theology which aims at completeness. For, as we have seen, certain aspects of the Divine activity as revealed in Nature, and certain elements in the religious experience of mankind, as manifested in Scripture and in human history, unquestionably imply it. But are we justified in regarding it as the main principle of our theology?

To clear our minds, let us present the idea in its simplest form. We think of God as Creator, maker of heaven and earth. What do we mean by this? Only by help of the things which come within our ken can we form an idea to represent those which lie beyond. We know

of man as a maker. We think of him as standing above and apart from the things he has made. He transcends them as the engineer transcends the machine he has constructed. So we think of God, the Eternal Creator of the universe, transcending all that He has made. Here is the idea of transcendence. It was the characteristic thought of the eighteenth century, non-Christian as well as Christian. Contrasted with it is the idea of the Divine Being as the Spirit which dwells in the universe as the soul of a man dwells in his body. The world, which our eyes can see and our hands touch, is the outward manifestation of an inward life, a universal soul or spirit, which is God. Here is the idea of Immanence.

When thus presented, the two ideas seem to stand in hopeless antagonism. The believer in the transcendence of Deity regards the believer in immanence as a pantheist, the latter regards the former as a crude and unphilosophical thinker to whom Creation is like the making of tables and chairs.

Further consideration shows that Holy Scripture speaks of God as the Eternal Father, who stands above and apart from the universe, and also of the Son, who is the Logos, the Light of the world, "the Light that lighteth every man," who "was in the world," a world which "was made through Him," who "became flesh and dwelt among us," who still, though exalted to the right hand of God, bears our human nature. In the distinction of the Divine Persons we find a means of bringing together the two great conceptions.

Modern philosophy has opened up a new way of approaching the question. The great analysis of experience, which we owe in the main to Berkeley, Kant, and Hegel, has taught us the priority of consciousness. We know that there is nothing of which we are, or can be, aware, which is independent of consciousness. If this is true of the world as known to us, it is also, we must conclude, true of the world apart from our knowledge—unless, indeed, the world apart from us be totally unlike the world as we know it; and this there is no reason to believe. Thus

we gain the conception of a great universal consciousness on which all that exists depends.

Side by side with this philosophical view of the universe, there has emerged, as we have seen, a scientific view which regards the history of Creation as a continuous evolution. The unity of nature is the chief idea here. From the simplest beginnings up to the most complex developments, from star-mist to civilisation, the universal process is under the guidance of some unifying principle. How inevitable that this principle should be identified with the universal consciousness to which philosophic thought testifies! Here is the Divine Immanence most gloriously revealed! Here we find the grandest results of science in harmony with the profoundest convictions of religion! God is the Spirit which guides the universal process, bringing order out of confusion, realising Himself. Not dwelling apart in lonely isolation, but living in the world, in its physical processes, in its organic developments, in the higher sphere of human and social existence. Everything we can know is, therefore, according to its due place and degree, a manifestation of God. We discern His mind in the order of Creation, we gain a still deeper knowledge of His nature in our own hearts, in conscience, in love. The highest things we know are, in the light of this doctrine, seen to be the clearest and best revelations of God. It is, therefore, no unscientific or unphilosophic attitude of mind to find the supreme revelation in Jesus Christ. The best and greatest among men is clearly the brightest image of the invisible God.

The grandeur, the simplicity, and the usefulness of this line of thought, in view of the needs of the present day, cannot be over-rated. To attack it as false, because the "New Theology" considers it sufficient, is surely a mistake. It seems to the writer that the best possible way to gain a just estimate of its value is to consider it in relation to Christian and human experience.

The very first element in this experience, which we must consider, is the life and teaching of our Lord. That we can find much in the Fourth Gospel and in the utterances

of our Lord as recorded in that Gospel which can be shown to be in harmony with this conception of Divine immanence—or, at least, not discordant with it—is quite clear. But to assert that this idea is characteristic of our Lord's teaching and attitude towards God, or, to go further, and to assert that this idea fully explains that teaching and attitude, is surely impossible. While it is true that spiritual inwardness is ever a mark of His religious and ethical teaching, our Lord does not habitually point to the God within; He points to the Father above. "Your heavenly Father" is the name by which He taught His disciples to think of God. "Our Father which art in heaven" is the familiar address which bids us ever look upward. The constantly repeated "in heaven," which we find connected with the thought of God, is evidently intended to lift our minds above this world to a higher order of being to which God essentially belongs. It is the simplest possible way of presenting to the unphilosophical worshipper the glorious transcendence of Deity. Heaven is "the throne of God," earth, this lower order of things, "the footstool of His feet" (Matt. v. 35). Heaven is the world of the eternal, the incorruptible, "where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Even the very idea of fatherhood as applied to God, and presented by our Lord, is expressive of the Divine transcendence. It teaches us, indeed, to think of God as the source of our being, but also as one who is ever watching over His children, providing for and guarding them with loving care, who is able to control the course of this world for their good. Over-ruling Providence, rather than indwelling, describes the relation of God to nature, which is suggested by this teaching. God is revealed to us as essentially a Higher Power, One who, because He is above all that belongs to the discords of the world, and because He is a loving Father, not an angry tyrant, may be trusted to bring good out of the evil. And this is why the revelation of the Father, which has been made to us in Jesus Christ is, and ever has been, satisfying to the needs of the heart. Amid all the cares and sorrows, the confusions

and disasters, of this life, we have need of the faith that over all there is an Infinite and Loving Power in whom we can trust.

If we were compelled to stop short at the conception of the Supreme Being as an indwelling Spirit realising Himself in all the processes of nature and of history, it is hard to see how the thought of God could be a source of any sure confidence as regards the present or hope for the future. While very impressive to the imagination and stimulating to the intelligence, this conception leaves the heart cold. Indeed, we may go so far as to say that its tendency is to fill the heart with a vague sense of mystery and dread. It is not at all clear that nature and life, apart from Christ's revelation of the Father, do not convey the impression of a passionless disregard of suffering, both animal and human, with a view to some end which is for us altogether out of sight and wholly disconnected with our individual, or even racial, welfare. We need a great faith in a higher order of things, a higher world, a higher power, a higher love, if we are to have confidence that the discords of this finite life shall ultimately be merged in the harmonies of the eternal. We need, that is, to believe in the transcendence as well as in the immanence of God.

It would be profitable and interesting to pursue this leading thought through our Lord's teaching in all its elements, and through the teaching of the New Testament generally, and it would certainly be found that, while the doctrine of immanence seems to be implied in many passages, especially of St. John and St. Paul, the doctrine of transcendence is clear and unmistakable and is everywhere characteristic. In the short space of this chapter, all that can be done is to show that this fact is no mere result of a naïve and childlike faith applying the simple language of our common life to the things of the spirit without question as to its philosophic fitness. We are here face to face with a distinction which goes down to the very foundations of our human and religious experience.

There is one fact which, in many shapes, renders futile all endeavour to reduce our thoughts concerning the great

universe in which we live to a single consistent system, a fact which, more than all others that we know, forces us to recognise an ultimate mystery in things. That fact is the existence of the individual soul. Modern philosophy, in its effort to understand the contents and implications of our consciousness, has been led to a view of the self, or ego, which forms its chief distinction as compared with the philosophy of antiquity. For thinkers in our time, the self stands revealed with a clearness unknown in former ages. It is implied in all knowledge. It is the presupposition of our consciousness.

Everything in my experience exists for me because "I" know it. There is, and can be, nothing else in experience so fundamental as this "I." Every other individual element could be removed without destroying experience, but the "I" must remain if experience is to exist at all. Whole departments of experience can go—as when a man loses his sight—yet the essentials will remain as long as the "I" is intact. Moreover, the sensations, thoughts, and other elements which together make up experience are, each one of them, such that they exist only as the possession of the "I." Colours exist for me, because I see them, sounds because I hear them, thoughts because I think them. Abolish the "I," and all must vanish. This line of thought, which has now become very familiar, has given a definiteness to our conception of the soul, or inner being, of man which did not formerly exist.

There is, however, a suspicion spreading widely at the present moment that the discovery of the subliminal consciousness—the subconscious self, as it has been called—must modify the view of the conscious self which has just been mentioned. It has come to light that we have a great store of mental possessions which do not rise into consciousness except under unusual or abnormal conditions; and that these are real possessions of ours—they really belong to us whether we are aware of them or not. Also there are indications of modes of communication between soul and soul by means of this subconscious region; or, at least, there are signs that through it one

mind can influence another. The boundaries of the individual self appear to be melting away, and it may seem as if there is no such distinctness of soul from soul as we were inclined to imagine.

But surely it is a mistake to deny a fact because some other fact turns up which seems at first sight inconsistent with it. The whole history of science is filled with the records of the discovery of new facts, and of the means by which seeming inconsistencies between new and old truths have been overcome. After all, it is absurd to doubt a truth because we find it is greater and more complex than we thought. The reality of the individual self is not rendered doubtful because we have discovered that it touches the universe at more points than those which we call our senses. There is, in fact—as we shall see if we reflect with some degree of carefulness—nothing more destructive of our belief in the reality of the individual soul in the truth that there is a great store of inner facts influencing us more or less, and able, under certain conditions, to enter our conscious experience, than in the truth that there is an infinite variety of outer facts, things belonging to the material world, which influence us, without our knowing it, and are able also, under proper conditions, to enter our experience.

And so our belief in the certainty of the teaching which we have learned from our own personal identity stands unshaken. The individual soul, or self, possesses a reality more fundamental than that possessed by anything else which comes within our experience. Here is the basis of our whole conscious existence, and of all certainty. If this be not true, truth has no meaning for us; for truth exists for us, because there is, in each one of us, a self, or soul, to grasp it.

All that modern philosophy has done in this connection is but to interpret to thought that doctrine of the infinite value of the individual soul which Christ gave to the world. In the practical sphere this doctrine becomes the recognition of personal responsibility. There is that in each one of us which stands alone against the world, alone

when face to face with God. In every individual is a source of spontaneity. Here is the truth which, with reference to our decisions and actions, we call free will. Here is the basis of our moral nature, the principle which makes goodness a reality and sin a possibility. Man is not a mere part of nature, not a link in a chain of physical causes; he is, within the limits which belong to his position, a free spirit made in the image of God. It is, of course, quite possible to produce very powerful arguments to prove that, in thinking of himself in this way man is deluding himself, but it is not possible to do so and preserve anything which can be called either morality or religion.

Historically, it was the urgency of the problems which arose out of this great truth which taught the Church the insufficiency of the conception of immanence. In the Alexandrian theology that conception was supreme. The Augustinian theology gave itself to the consideration of the questions of free will, sin, forgiveness, atonement, and was compelled to think of God as transcendent. There are those who regard this whole theology as a huge mistake; but they forget that it was inevitable. They fail to realise that it was only dealing, to the best of its ability, with the great central problem presented by our moral being in its relation to God. They also ignore the fact that that problem exists to-day, and that the time will come when our modern theology must be prepared to face it afresh. For a time, owing to physical science and its endeavour to unify our knowledge about the material universe, the cosmological aspect of theology seemed the most pressing, and therefore thought turned back to the idea of immanence. But the greater and more intensely human problems are beginning to press again, and, once again, we shall find the necessity of remembering that God is transcendent as well as immanent.

And this consideration enables us to approach that higher way of regarding the idea of transcendence after which we have been feeling all along. While we think of the universe as a continuous chain of causes and effects, pervaded throughout by some one great principle

of organisation, and combine with this thought the idea of consciousness as the underlying truth of all that we know as existence, we can understand that belief in a great Immanent Spirit should seem the loftiest of all possible creeds. Compared with it, the idea of a Maker of things seems almost childish. But when we come to realise that the universe is no such simple matter as many of our contemporaries seem to think—that, besides the physical order of cause and effect, it contains a vast multitude of centres of consciousness, spiritual beings possessed of some degree of independence, with will and moral faculty, capable of goodness and of evil, each, from its own point of view, a world in itself—we feel that the ultimate truth needs some further expression if it is to be expressed at all. How to attempt any expression is a question which may well make us pause. We can, however, see that the mere idea of immanence is not adequate. Every human spirit may be said to be immanent in its own experience. It is because of this that we are able to think of the Infinite Spirit as immanent in nature. But our knowledge of ourselves gives us no power to imagine a spirit capable of giving being, not merely to a world of phenomena, but to a world of persons. Here is something which transcends not only nature as we know it, but spirit as we know it. There must be some higher principle: so we are compelled to believe.

That Christian theology was led to hold a doctrine of God which involves such transcendence as this is certainly a fact worthy of our consideration in view of the controversies of the present time.

When our thought seeks to approach these sublimest heights of theological speculation, we seem to have left behind all that belongs to the practical side of our religious life. Yet a little consideration should convince us that this is not so. For here is that which guards—though we seldom realise the fact—our great heritage of personal dignity and freedom. Its meaning, from the human point of view, is that man is neither sunk, as a mere thing, in the world of physical causes, nor is his personality merged

in the Personality of God. He has his place as a created spirit between God above and nature below. He possesses freedom because he is neither subject to the necessity which binds the material order, nor is his conscious and volitional life a mere aspect of the life of God. He is capable of goodness and of evil, because he possesses that freedom which is a trust committed to him by God above him, and for which he must give account. In human experience morality has always this reference to a larger order in which man must take his place. Thus the great problem of sin and forgiveness arises.

Thinkers who make the immanence of God the corner-stone of their theology are always inclined to minimise or explain away the fact of sin. This is inevitable, for if the life of man be but a moment or aspect of the life of God, there is, in truth, no place for sin, nor, indeed, for individual freedom. Such teaching is simply untrue to human experience. It forgets that, if it is to be in any sense a theology, it must deal with the data of religion, and not with those of physics merely. And on this subject of sin, responsibility, and the need of forgiveness, the voice of religious experience speaks with no uncertainty.

Surely we have seen reason to believe that, even when viewed in relation to modern thought, there is need of the idea of the Divine transcendence as well as of the idea of Divine immanence, if we are to take account of the facts of human and Christian experience.

CHAPTER VI

THE ATONEMENT

THE considerations which have just occupied our thoughts lead us on naturally to the subject of the Atonement. Here we are confronted by difficulties which have proved sorely perplexing to the understanding. While faith clings to the doctrine of salvation through the cross of Christ, intelligence fails to see how the death of one person can avail for the pardon of another. To the modern mind, trained in the methods of scientific thought, the explanations which are offered fail to prove convincing. The whole question seems to belong to the realm of the mystical, and to be out of touch with everything which is now regarded as exact thinking.

There are many who solve the problem by simply declaring that it has no existence. They maintain that what is called atonement is simply such a revelation of the character of God that the sinner is convinced of the infinite love of God, and is brought to see that God bears him no malice on account of his sins, but is ready to receive him into favour and blessing. According to this view, the suffering and death of Christ are a manifestation of the love of God, and as such move men to repentance and supply moral power for the overcoming of evil. When through Christ men get to know God as He is, they are lifted into a new spiritual world in which sin has no longer power to enslave them.

If this be sufficient, it is clear that the problem of the atonement, as generally understood, has no existence. The only thing which stands in the way of our pardon is our own spiritual blindness.

There can be no doubt that, for those who believe in the Divinity of our Lord, His death is the greatest possible revelation of Divine love, and the strongest assurance of God's readiness to pardon the penitent. But, as has been very often pointed out, if this be the whole of the atonement, what is to be said about the Divine justice? Is there to be no vindication of those great laws of righteousness which as truly belong to the nature of God as that supreme love which we delight to attribute to Him? Dare we so conceive the love of God as to deny His justice? Is a love great which so operates as to permit the laws of righteousness to be set at naught with impunity?

Again, in relation to Scripture, this view fails to give any satisfactory account of the whole imagery of sacrifice and of ransom which we find applied to the work of Christ for man. Also, in relation to religious experience, it fails to explain the conviction in the heart of every repentant sinner that something must be done to make up for sin, and the further conviction, which has been ever the source of peace to Christian believers, that Christ has done what is necessary. The idea of substitution, however it may be criticised, has always afforded an unfailing supply of spiritual comfort and power to the soul.

These are old questions, and it is not too much to say that they have never been answered satisfactorily by the adherents of that view of the atonement which has just been mentioned.

But in discussing the question thus we are dealing with abstractions. It is far more important to come face to face, if we can, with the concrete facts of that moral situation with which the atonement, if there be such a thing, must deal. It is not too daring to say that in the controversies concerning this question there has been too much of the abstract; the concrete problem has been largely overlooked. Yet if we are to find the real problem, we must find it in the concrete.

Sin is sin; it acquires, that is, its character as sin, rather than as moral failure; because it is an offence against God. But great as is the illumination which this truth sheds upon

the nature of sin, it provides no measure, no moral standard, by which to bring the question within the bounds of our judgment. What thus appears is not quantity, but quality. We gain, not a measure, but the impression of the immeasurable. It may be that this impression conveys the highest truth, but we are not in a position to see that it does. It used to be sometimes said that sin, as an offence against God the Infinite, must be infinite in its nature, and therefore demand infinite punishment. The argument is seldom pressed nowadays, and wisely; for the statement is one which is equally hard to affirm and to deny. It is even difficult to know exactly what it means; but it seems to confuse quality with quantity, and to argue that the most awful characteristic of sin must necessarily, on account of this highest degree of awfulness, imply an endless result.

There are, however, ways of regarding sin which, while equally true, are more within our comprehension, and which supply a means of measurement, so far as measurement is possible in such a case. Sin may, like goodness, be regarded from the side of character and from the side of end. Every action, every decision of the will, corresponds to a particular determination of the character of the agent. When the action is in the right, the character is formed or strengthened to some degree; when the action is in the wrong, the character is injured or weakened to some degree.

So, again, every decision of the will aims at some end. In the case of right conduct, the true end is attained; in the case of wrong conduct, the true end is not attained—some end which is not the true good prevails. And, let it be noted, the true good in each instance is perfectly individualised; it corresponds exactly to the circumstances, which are unique and can never be reproduced. The moral situation can never be repeated.

Further, all good ends are stages in a great universal process designed to bring about the supreme end, the kingdom of God. No other supposition will satisfy the demands of the Christian conscience and the Christian revelation. God's purpose in creation, if there be any

truth in the Christian view of the world, is the establishment of a perfect order of things through the loving co-operation of the wills of His moral creatures, working under His guidance and in harmony with Himself. And, corresponding to the external order, there is the internal order created in each moral being who participates in the great process, a character which results from the exercise of a will in harmony with the will of God.

Here we are provided with a means by which we can estimate sin. Regard it from the side of character, and its relation to the whole moral economy becomes sufficiently clear for our purpose. Every collocation of circumstances which provides a field for moral activity is a perfectly unique opportunity for the construction of character. Misspent, the loss can never be made good. No amount of goodness at a later stage can repair the injury which was inflicted—the scar remains. The goodness of the later life was due in any case.

Or think of the situation from the point of view of the end. Each attainment of the true end of life is, as it were, a stone laid in its true position in the great temple of existence. Every failure is a stone laid awry, or, rather, it is an undermining of the foundations. And here, again, as we have seen, the circumstances are in each case unique. The evil once done can never be undone. It is an evil which affects, not the individual only, but also the whole purpose of creation. One element which was intended to take its share in the production of the supreme result has been withdrawn, and can never be restored—or rather, in its place has been inserted a destructive element, which no subsequent effort can remove.

The case is even more terrible when we consider the evil which one soul can do to another. No man's sins affect himself alone. In some cases a sinful life becomes a centre of moral pestilence. Yet such a life can be changed ; the man who has lived it can repent and, as we believe, be forgiven. But his change of heart and life will not undo the evil which he caused in others, nor stop the spread of the pernicious influence which he originated. It

is possible to imagine terrible cases. An innocent soul falls victim to the temptations spread round it by another, is dragged through the deepest depths of shame and degradation, and dies an outcast. The tempter lives to repent, perhaps to devote himself to good works; but no effort of his can restore the purity he destroyed or brighten the blackness of the despair with which the poor outcast faced the terrors of death.

These reflections may be familiar to many readers, and it may seem needless to repeat them here, but the fact is that they have not been sufficiently considered by those who have taken in hand to deal with the doctrine of the atonement.[1] Dr. Denney, one of the most recent and one of the ablest of modern writers on this doctrine, regards them as the consequence of a purely physical conception of the universe. And it is perfectly true that the argument from the impossibility of undoing the physical results of sin has been pressed in a way which put aside unduly the moral aspect of the truth. As Dr. Denney says, "The modern mind has given passionate expression" to the belief "that forgiveness is impossible. Sin is, and it abides. The sinner can never escape from the past. His future is mortgaged to it, and it cannot be redeemed. He can never get back the years which the locust has eaten. His leprous flesh can never come again like the flesh of a little child. Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap, and reap for ever and ever. It is not eternal punishment which is incredible; nothing else has credibility. Let there be no illusion about this: forgiveness is a violation, a reversal of law, and no such thing is conceivable in a world in which law reigns."[2]

This is a fair representation of the manner in which the argument has been presented. But to dismiss it, as Dr.

[1] Dr. Moberly, in his great work, *Atonement and Personality*, does not deal with this problem. Dr. Dale approached it in his criticism of Dr. Young, but cannot be said to have dealt with it generally. His criticism is addressed to a particular and very unsatisfactory statement of it.

[2] Denney, *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, p. 78.

Denney does, with the remark "that sin and its consequences are here conceived as though they belonged to a purely physical world, whereas, if the world were only physical, there could be no such thing as sin,"[1] is to turn aside from the very central problem of the atonement. It is perfectly true, as he says, that the question "is not one of logic or of physical law, but of personality, of character, of freedom." But, as we have seen, the unpardonableness of sin becomes even more terribly distinct when we view the question from the side "of personality, of character, of freedom."[2]

From the purely physical point of view there is, it is true, no such thing as sin. It is for that reason that, as we are told, "the modern man is not worrying about his sins." If the physical world, conceived as a universal evolutionary process, be the final truth, penitence becomes a meaningless weeping over spilt milk, and the less there is of it the better. No wonder, at a time when the influence of physical science on the whole of life is so great, and when so many have learned to think of physics as the one really certain form of knowledge, that the sense of sin should seem to disappear. But when the moral and spiritual faculties are awakened, the consciousness of sin revives, and then it is discovered that the inexorableness of the laws of nature is but the under side of this most terrible of all facts—that there is, and can be, no way of making reparation for sin.

Thus we find ourselves face to face with the most tremendous of all human needs, the most awful of all problems. Surely it is the dim consciousness of this truth which explains those strange facts of penitential experience which may be found, in one form or another, in all ages and among all races. The feeling that it is necessary to do some great thing, to undergo some great suffering, to submit to some severe discipline, to make some great sacrifice; all strange forms of asceticism, doctrines of merit and means of acquiring it; the belief in a fate which pursues a man to his death—these, with the ever-present

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 79. [2] *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

sense of failure, are witnesses to the existence of a great moral dilemma in which humanity finds itself placed, and from which there is no escape. The atonement is the most necessary of all things, and, so far as our faculties can discover, the most impossible.

On the plane of natural law and, to rise higher, on the plane of moral experience, it is, then, useless to seek for a solution of the problem; the categories of our thought are not adequate to the task. But are we to conclude that what is impossible with men is also impossible with God? Surely not. The true conclusion is that an atonement, if it is to be at all, must be transcendent: it must belong to a realm of being to which our minds cannot ascend; it must be in the strictest sense *supernatural.*

In the present condition of thought we have great need to distinguish carefully between the *transcendent* and the *transcendental.* The latter term has become the mark of a school of philosophy which holds that thought is, when rightly employed, adequate to the explanation of all reality. Thought and reality are, they hold, conterminous—indeed, identical. *Transcendental* is an adjective which describes this employment of thought. It implies, not the existence of a realm beyond thought, but, on the contrary, the power of thought to pass beyond limits which shut in the common understanding. In this sense the word may be rightly and conveniently used even by those who are unable to regard transcendentalism as the final philosophy. The *transcendent*, on the other hand, is that which lies beyond the reach of our thought. Those who use it commit themselves to the belief that there is a region of being which is outside our experience and above the grasp of our faculties.

It may be noted as a characteristic of the present situation in philosophic study that there is a growing conviction that the final reality is beyond us.[1] The categories which belong to our thinking, whether in the abstract scientific understanding or in the more concrete philosophical reason, are not able to contain the ultimate

[1] See F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, Chap. xxvii.

truth of the universe. All the new forms of doctrine which have arisen out of the ashes of the Hegelian philosophy agree with the quasi-scientific agnosticism on this point. It is a notable fact, and one that Christian thinkers would do well to ponder.

Now, there is no conception which has come to light in recent years which should prove more fruitful in the field of theology than that of *degrees of reality*. We can see its meaning most easily by thinking of the spiritual, as known to us in our own conscious experience, in relation to the material. How is it that man is able to control for his own ends the iron laws of nature, to bend them to his purposes, and yet not break them? It is, indeed, as we saw, just because of their absolutely trustworthy character that man can depend upon the laws of nature to effect his designs. The truth is that the spiritual belongs to a higher order of reality than the material, and to the higher the lower submits without suffering any violation of its nature. To those who are familiar with the idealist criticism of experience, the meaning of the distinction will be apparent. If man, then, because of his spiritual nature, can supervene upon the material world and effect results which material forces left to themselves could never accomplish, can we, considering the ragged ends of all our theories, doubt the existence of a Reality higher than any known to us, which, supervening upon our world, can bring all that hangs disconnected in it to a final unity?

This Higher Reality and the final unity which corresponds to it are for us, at least in our present existence, transcendent.

Now, surely, if there is any point at which it is necessary to discern the supervention of the Higher Reality, it is at the supreme problem of human life. The atonement is God's dealing with the problem of evil. It is the solution of that problem, not in theory, but in the realm of fact and life. But all the difficulties which belong to the theoretical solution of the problem must beset our endeavour to understand and explain the practical solution. Can there be a question that this is the reason

why no theory of the Atonement has ever proved completely satisfying, and why the categories which are employed to convey the truth to the mind are always more or less inadequate?

When we turn to the New Testament, we find the atonement presented to us under a great variety of conceptions. It is a redemption, a propitiation, a reconciliation. It is specifically identified with the death of Christ. In His death our Lord bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He died for all. He redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. He was made sin for us. He gave His life a ransom for many.

Many great efforts have been made to work these ideas up into a consistent whole; with what degree of success is known to all students of theology. One fact has emerged with great clearness: no one image or conception will bear being elaborated into a system. Contradiction arises from every such attempt.

But it is only theology which has suffered from this failure. Christian experience is absolutely unfaltering in its testimony to the fact that salvation through the death of Christ is the message which brings conviction to the human soul and gives assurance of pardon and power for the spiritual life. The influence of the cross of Christ upon the life of man is witnessed to by all the ages of Christian history, and in the experience of that influence certain elements may be clearly discerned. These elements are mainly: death the inevitable penalty or result of sin; the sinless Son of God of His own free-will, and as the expression of the Father's love, undergoing death for us; deliverance from sin, otherwise impossible, manifested first as free forgiveness, and secondly as spiritual power. These elements have never been absent from the Christian experience.

Let it be noted that the sense of sin gives to death a meaning, or rather force, which death as a mere physical fact does not possess,[1] and that this meaning is not

[1] Well shown by Dr. Denney, *op. cit.*, pp. 63 *et seq.*

adequately represented by such words as "penalty" or "result"; and secondly, that the death of Christ derives an awful significance from our belief as to the Personality of Him who underwent it. Here are two elements which, from the very nature of things, pass beyond the grasp of our faculties, and, *for that very reason*, have all the more power over us. It is the depth of these elements which makes the soul accept with gladness statements about the death of Christ which would be meaningless if made about any other death. We interpret the language in terms, not of ideas, but of experience, and have no difficulty in believing that, in such a case, the greatest meaning is the truest.

And here is the clue to the logic of the position: when we are dealing with the things of God, the greatest meaning is always the truest. For when we speak of God, we have to use inadequate language. In His true nature He is transcendent—that is, all our human categories when applied to Him, are but symbols of something greater, and the greatest meaning we can give them is not great enough. We call God "Father," for example, but we know that the highest significance we can give to the word is not high enough.

If this principle applies anywhere, it applies to the case of the atonement; for, as we have seen, if there be such a thing at all, it is concerned with the most inscrutable of all mysteries.

To sum up, then, the atonement must be a fact belonging to the very highest realm of truth. It must be transcendent. It can, therefore, be conveyed to our minds only by means of symbols, which are inevitably inadequate. To construct a consistent and perfectly rationalised theory of it is impossible. But to say this is not to condemn the efforts of the theologian, for the atonement is known as a fact in the living experience of the Christian faith, and the mind must ever do its best to keep pace with the soul's experience. Every true effort of the Christian thinker is, to some degree, an approach to a mystery of Divine love, which can manifest itself under an infinite variety of forms

to the human intelligence; and the fact that all such modes of representation reach out towards a truth too great for our comprehension corresponds exactly with the teaching of our human experience concerning the problem of evil.

CHAPTER VII

SUFFERING AND ATONEMENT

THE conclusion at which we have arrived, that the atonement must be essentially a transcendent thing, that its nature must be such—if it be at all—that it cannot be explored by our faculties, may seem to remove it so far from our human experience as to make it practically unreal for us. If it be thus out of reach, why think of it at all? If it belong to a realm of being essentially higher than this world, how can it come into practical relationship with our earthly needs?

It is certainly important to consider this question. The glory of Christianity, from the human point of view, has always been its ability to supply the spiritual wants of the simple; and of the atonement it is conspicuously the case that, while it has been hidden from the wise, it has ever been revealed unto babes. The despair of the theologian, it has ever been the sure resting-place of the sin-stricken soul. The simple statements that Christ died for sinners, that He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that He gave His life a ransom for many, have given peace and strength to multitudes in all ages. There must be some reason, very deep down in human nature and human experience, why this is so. And this human reason must surely have a relation to that ultimate Divine mystery which is the final truth of the atonement. It is therefore important, so far as we can, to examine the human side of the problem with the view of finding how far such examination will take us.

Many studies of the atonement begin with the idea of justice as we know it in our earthly experience, and

from this they go on to think of the punishment which justice demands. A further step is concerned with the possible means by which such punishment may be averted. Then, in one form or other, there comes the difficulty: How can the punishment of one person avail for another? How can justice be satisfied by such a transaction?

There are two great questions involved in this whole line of thought. First, how can punishment be an atonement? Though it may have a place in the administration of earthly law, how can it make restoration in a realm in which the moral and spiritual side of things is the essential? Secondly, even supposing that punishment has an atoning efficacy, how can the punishment of Christ avail for the sinner?

It will assist us towards an answer to the first question to consider that, on the level of earthly experience, and within certain narrow limits, there is a possibility of atonement. There is such a thing as the satisfaction of justice, and that in a very real sense. For example, in case of injury, when restitution is possible, it is necessary, if justice is to be satisfied. There are cases in which an injury can be measured—apart from its higher, its moral, aspect—in terms of money. The publication of a falsehood, for instance, involves some one in great financial loss. It is surely necessary, for the satisfaction of justice, that he who published the falsehood should pay the money and so make good the loss—even though no payment can ever make good the evil of falsehood.

Again, there are cases in which faults may be, in a true sense, atoned for by love and service. A man has led another into evil ways: awakened to a sense of the dreadful nature of his sin, the man devotes himself to a work of rescue and finally saves his victim, and restores him to goodness and happiness. Such a man may truly be said to have made an atonement for his sin. In such a case, mere repentance—as generally understood—is not enough.

Further, there is a true sense in which it may be said that punishment is itself an atonement. It restores the

moral balance. This appears especially if we consider the case of a man who has committed some crime and escaped the legal consequences. Pursued by conscience, he finally confesses his guilt, and suffers the penalty. Such a man has certainly, so far as it lay in his power, made atonement. And, apart from the infliction of legal punishment, there are cases in which, as a consequence of some fault, great suffering has come upon the sinner, and it has been felt that here was a penalty which did away with that desire to inflict punishment which is the natural reaction of moral indignation against the evil-doer. The vengeance of God—as it appeared to be—the punishment inflicted by Providence—seemed enough to satisfy the demands of justice.

There can be no doubt that such reflections as these have largely influenced the minds of those who, whether as popular expositors or as students, have endeavoured to form some conception of the atonement; and can it be questioned that we have here a side of the problem which should not be ignored?

It is sometimes asked, What relation can there be between sin and suffering? What common measure is there between moral fault and physical evil? If there is no such common measure, how can wrong-doing be recompensed with punishment?

Yet, in spite of the difficulties expressed by these questions, it has been universally recognised that the offender must be punished with suffering. Society must so express its condemnation of crime. And, in a wider sphere, the condemnation which the conscience pronounces upon sin can be expressed only by means of the suffering of the guilty. The condemnation which the awakened soul pronounces upon its own sin can be expressed only by the sorrow of penitence.

If a hasty treatment of so perplexing a question may be hazarded, may it not be said that the relation between sin and suffering is something like the relation between mnid and matter? In each case the spiritual is on a different, a higher, plane of being. Just as mind cannot be measured

in terms of matter, so sin cannot be measured in terms of suffering. Yet the material is an element in, or a condition of, the spiritual; and so suffering is an element in, or a condition of, the due penalty of sin. And as, for the unenlightened mind, the material world seems the only reality; so, for the unawakened conscience, the physical consequence, the suffering, seems the only penalty. Further, as it is by means of the material that the mind rises to the realisation of the spiritual, so it is by means of suffering that the soul rises to the height of the moral judgment upon sin, and to an understanding of the spiritual nature of the more terrible consequences which it entails.

Again, to many nowadays the very idea of retribution is distasteful. It seems to them a remnant of barbarism, a survival from primitive times. It expresses, they think, the flaring up of anger in the breast of the injured, and the passionate effort to execute vengeance. The aim of punishment, they think, should be entirely the instruction or restoration of the sinner; or, according to another theory, the protection of society. Without at all wishing to disparage these ends, or to represent them as inconsistent with one another or with the idea of retribution, it must be observed that moral indignation is not only an important element in the expression of the deliverances of conscience, but also a mighty force to insure the doing of justice.

There is, however, a way of presenting the idea of retribution which lifts it above all mere dependence upon feeling or considerations of utility. In the sphere of ethics there is always a correspondence between duties and rights. If one person has a duty, then some other person, or the community as a whole, has a right in regard to that person. Further, he who is bound to perform a duty is also the possessor of a right which corresponds to that duty. Thus, in the State, the citizen who does his duty to the State has a right to the protection of the State and to the other advantages of citizenship. If he fails in his duty, the State is bound to call on him to do it, and, in certain cases, to punish him if he fails. Or, we may, to unify our thought, say that, in case of failure, the man has a right to

his punishment. It is what corresponds to his moral situation. This mode of expression may be universalised, and we may say that, in every case, the sinner has a right to his punishment. It is what corresponds to his moral situation. If he does not get it, his being is so far incomplete. He is deprived of something which, however he may shrink from it, is necessary to restore the moral balance in his case.

It must, however, be noted that, while we are moving among these ideas, our thought is on the plane of *the right*—the plane on which the moral is conceived as that which is according to law. On this plane, goodness takes the form of *righteousness*. The rule of the will is called *duty*, or *obligation*. There are spiritual planes on which these conceptions disappear, because they are lost in higher ones. Christ exalts us to such planes. But, we must remember, the principle of *the right* is true and accurate on its own level, and that is the level on which suffering can take the form of punishment or retribution.

Let us, however, consider this whole question on another plane—the plane of *the good* as distinguished from that of *the right*. It was on this plane that we were able to discover the moral quality of the results of sin, and so were led to see its unpardonable nature.

According to this way of regarding things, the universe is moving to an end. That end may be described as the kingdom of God in its perfection, a universe made perfect. For the individual, the end is his complete moral development in relation to the universe regarded as moral. This involves also the perfect development of all his faculties in correspondence with his environment, and his happiness or well-being on all sides of his individuality. In relation to each moment of his existence this means the continual choosing of the good—that is, of the end which corresponds to the immediate situation, and which is a step towards the realisation of the ultimate end—and, as a necessary result of this continual choosing, the continual building up of his character towards perfection.

From the Divine point of view, so far as it can be pre-

sented to our minds, we must think of God perpetually willing the good. The ultimate end may indeed be defined as the Will of God. But its accomplishment depends upon the harmony of our wills with His—at least, so far as our share is concerned. If we are to attain to the good, and to contribute to the realisation of the final good, then we must do the will of God, and that not once, nor on some great occasions merely, but in every determination of our wills.

From this point of view the reward of goodness is seen to be the good itself—the attainment of the end—the realisation of the purpose—of our being. This includes all fulness of life, all happiness, all contribution to the life and happiness of others, all share in the final perfection. On the other hand, the punishment of evil conduct is just the loss of the good—that loss suffered in each instance of failure, impressed upon the character in the shape of moral degradation, affecting our various faculties in the form of limitations and unhappinesses, inflicted upon others so far as they come under our influence or are acted upon by our conduct.

It is not, of course, meant that there are not numberless questions which can be raised in criticism of this whole way of thinking. But, notwithstanding those questions, it seems clear that, for those who believe that our experience demands a spiritual interpretation, this general view of things is the best we can attain to.

When we now turn back upon our special subject and consider these last reflections in the light of the ideas we have presented to our minds, we find the punishment of sin takes another form. It becomes the inevitable result of evil conduct, inseparable from the sin itself, and indeed, from the highest point of view, identical with the sin. Nor does this lighten the burden of it, or make the penal aspect more endurable. In truth, it leads, as we have already seen, to the conclusion that sin is essentially unpardonable.

There is a growing tendency in some quarters at present to adopt a view of sin which is directly at variance with all this—a view which has been taken over from biological

science. It is held that evil is simply a lower form of good. It is a survival from an earlier age. Just as there may appear in a race of living creatures an abnormal variation which is a reversion to a type belonging to an earlier stage of development, so in human conduct there appear modes of action which are wrong simply because they are primitive. And just as the lower forms of life are stages in the formation of the higher, so evil is good in the making. In accordance with this view, it is contended, is the fact that some of the highest characters have been formed through sin and repentance, and it is asserted that, as the higher only exists in contrast to the lower, so the good exists only by the overcoming of the evil.

Those who argue in this way forget that the facts with which they are dealing are essentially different from the facts of the physical order. The moral order has its own facts and its own laws, and nothing but confusion can result from reasoning about moral problems in terms which belong to physics and biology. It is not true to say that the existence of the good implies the existence of the evil. The good implies the possibility of evil, but not the actuality. Here we are dealing with the will; and the good will is the will which has rejected evil, but not necessarily the will which has first sinned and then repented. A will perfectly good would be a will which in all its choosing rejected the evil and determined upon the good. The character which corresponded to such a will would inevitably stand at a higher level than that which, even on one occasion, first yielded to sin and then repented. He who prevails after struggle knows the full power of the evil, because he resists to the end. The sinner yields before the final stress has come. Therefore the man who prevails has endured the more perfect discipline, and at the same time has escaped the injury occasioned by a fall. To lose even one good action is to lose one of the elements of good which should have gone to the building up of the character. Every moral situation is unique and incapable of repetition. We find therefore, inherent in the very nature of moral right and wrong, the necessary and appropriate reward of the good

and the necessary and appropriate punishment of the evil.

But how, we may well ask, can there be an atoning quality in punishment when it is thus regarded? The punishment of sin is now seen to be the moral loss and the degradation which result from it. These can have no restoring potency or atoning value. And this is perfectly true. The moral results of sin, taken by themselves, are wholly evil. But what do we find when we turn from the abstract discussion of the problem to the facts of human experience? We find that there is blended with the moral results an element of suffering. It may be physical suffering or mental anguish or the sting which accompanies moral failure. And certainly this suffering is often recognised as possessing, on the human level, an atoning value. If a man reduce himself to penury in order to pay his debts, we applaud his honesty, but we feel instinctively that the fact that his sacrifice involved suffering has much to do with the reality of the atonement he has made.

Or, consider the case of one who, having led another into sin, repents, and then, with infinite pains and self-denial, devotes himself to the restoration of his victim. Of such a man our ordinary untheological judgment would say, "He has made atonement," and we should be moved to this decision by the sense of his sufferings and of the moral determination behind them. Suffering filled with love and self-sacrifice comes nearer to possessing an intrinsic atoning value than anything else in our experience.

It will be said, however, that the true atonement resides in the moral element and not in the suffering. Let it be considered on the other hand that, as we saw above, the suffering is, as it were, the material element. As such it acts as a spur to awaken the moral nature. It is also the medium in which the moral endeavour moves. Apart from it the moral effort would be as soul without body. Thus suffering fills, in the economy of the moral universe, a place of vital importance.

Now let us place side by side our ideal view of the world, and the view which we obtain by looking at the

plain facts of life. The ideal shows us a great Divine plan according to which, by the due subordination of all finite wills to the supreme will, there should result a glorious harmony—a universe of being in which every individual would, according to his place in the whole, attain his perfection, and so the whole be perfected.

As a fact, we find a world in which there is indeed progress—movement upwards towards a greater degree of perfection—but full of evil and full also of suffering. And —here is the most suggestive fact—we find that progress is always through loss and suffering. In the world of animate being we see individual struggling with individual and race with race, and out of the conflict higher forms emerging. In human life we see a similar struggle, but with keener pains, more terrible losses, more exalted values. The moral element adds a dreadful intensity. There are lost souls as well as lost lives, the anguish of remorse as well as the tortures of the flesh.

In one great life and personality men have found, as they believe, a clue to the mystery. And what is the main teaching of that life as regards this problem? It is the great law of victory through suffering, gain through loss, life through death. This is the lesson which our Lord continually enforced. It is His own teaching, constantly repeated, as to the meaning of His death. The great work which He came to do had to be accomplished in this way or not at all. The suffering and death of Christ are presented to us as one great fact. The death was the completion of all His sacrificial sufferings. And the fact that it was followed by the resurrection, that out of it He came triumphant over evil, marked the accomplishment of the work which He set before Himself. Thus the death of Christ sums up all human experience of sin and suffering.

We find also that from the death of Christ there sprang a great spiritual experience. In the Epistles of St. Paul we have this experience presented with extraordinary power and vividness. Here is the true theme of the Epistle to the Romans. By faith the sinner enters into union with Christ and becomes a partaker in His death and resurrection,

dying to sin and living unto righteousness. Not only so, but suffering itself acquired a new meaning. It became a blessed experience. The penal quality fell from it, and it became a participation in the work of Christ and a means of gaining deeper experience of the life of Christ; so that the Apostle can say: "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." So, again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews suffering is regarded as a glorious triumph of faith or as the chastening of the Lord. And St. Peter can say of the suffering of the innocent that it is "acceptable with God. For hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow His steps." So in the Apocalypse it is said of the victory of the saints over the great power of evil, "They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death."

The death of Christ therefore occupies a central position in the spiritual experience of the human race, and we can see quite far enough into the meaning of things to understand why the announcement of its supreme efficacy carried conviction to the hearts of men. But we have not understood how it was that the death of one availed for others. We saw that suffering filled with love and self-sacrifice is, in our human experience, that which most of all possesses an atoning value. But every really convincing instance of such atonement shows us the sinner atoning—so far as such atonement is possible—for his own sin. The payment of debt is the only human example in which one man can make atonement for another, and this, as we recognise immediately, does not go deeply into the moral problem. How then could Christ, the sinless, atone for the sins of the guilty? How could He take their guilt upon Himself? How could justice be satisfied by the punishment of the innocent instead of the guilty?

The history of the doctrine of the Atonement is the history of the endeavour to answer these questions or others like them. In all ages thought returned again and again

to the ideas of the satisfaction of Divine justice, of sacrifice, of substitution. It is common nowadays to represent this last idea as modern. But in Athanasius, to take one early example, it is frequent and unmistakable. Writing of the Incarnation, he describes how the Logos took to Himself a body capable of death, "that it, having partaken of the Logos which is over all, might be fitted to die instead of all (*ἀντὶ πάντων*)."[1] And again: "Offering unto death, as an oblation and sacrifice free from any stain, the body He had taken to Himself, He did away with death from all his peers by the offering of an equivalent (*Τῶν ὁμοίων ἠφάνιζε τὸν θάνατον τῇ προσφορᾷ τοῦ καταλλήλου*)."[1] With Anselm the atonement is a supreme act of homage which makes up for the affront which human sin offers to the majesty of God—an idea which shows the influence of the feudal customs of the age. Coming to later times, we find Luther representing the death of Christ as the enduring of the actual suffering due to human sins. This thought has penetrated the popular mind of modern Christianity more completely than any other. It is the true starting-point of all our modern discussions of the subject.

Out of the criticism of this theory have arisen several modern views which have attracted much attention. Dr. Dale held that it was necessary that God should assert the principle that sin deserves punishment. The eternal law of righteousness must be vindicated. "Some Divine act is required which shall have all the moral worth and significance of the act by which the penalties of sin would have been inflicted on the sinner." It belonged to God "to assert by His own act that suffering is the just result of sin. He asserts it . . . by enduring suffering Himself. . . The mysterious unity of the Father and the Son rendered it possible for God at once to endure and to inflict penal suffering."[2]

Another modern view is that of Dr. McLeod Campbell. According to it, Christ offered to God a perfect confession

[1] Athanasius, *The Incarnation*, c. ix.
[2] Dale on *The Atonement*, pp. 391–393.

of human sin, "a perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sin of man." [1]

A view which approaches this latter is that of Bishop Westcott and Dr. Moberly, which sees in the work of Christ a perfect repentance. Christ as man offered to God on the cross, "not only the sacrifice of utter obedience . . . but also the sacrifice of supreme penitence." [2] Dr. Moberly holds that sinlessness is necessary for perfect penitence, and justifies the paradox with great subtlety of thought.

A very usual theory with modern writers is that what Christ offered to God was a perfect obedience. In Him alone the will of God for man was perfectly accomplished. And it must be confessed that there is much in Holy Scripture which agrees with the doctrine.

There is, no doubt, much that is true in all these doctrines. But they are all incomplete, for they are all open to the same objection. It is surely as hard to see how the confession, or the repentance, or the obedience, of one can avail for another, as to see how punishment can avail in like case. Vicarious repentance or vicarious obedience is as hard to justify as vicarious punishment.

It must, of course, be admitted that every careful thinker sees this difficulty more or less clearly, and tries to deal with it; and the explanation given is always in essence the same. It amounts to this—that Christ as universal includes all men. And the language of many parts of the New Testament bears out this explanation. Our Lord's own teaching, as given especially in some parts of St. John's Gospel, particularly the parable of the Vine and the Branches, the teaching of St. Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians, with its constant repetition of ἐν Χριστῷ and ἐν αὐτῷ, and many other passages, express this principle of the universality of the relation which Christ bears to mankind. Here we may venture to find one aspect of the Incarnation, and to discern the point of contact between that truth and the Atonement.

[1] McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 4th ed., p. 135.

[2] Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, p. 129.

By far the most elaborate effort to think out this principle is that of Dr. Moberly, in his *Atonement and Personality*. His argument is directed to show that personality as it exists in man has not that degree of separate identity which we attribute to it. He holds that the self of man comes to itself only as it is "consummated in God." "It is the capital mistake of human thought to set out with the conception of human self-hood, as though it were already a completed verity." "Philosophical thought is . . . teaching us that created personality is not, and cannot be, a really distinct or self-subsistent centre of being."

It seems to the writer that Dr. Moberly's doctrine tends to destroy that personal identity and personal freedom which are the fundamental presuppositions of our moral and spiritual life. It is as mischievous to deny these truths in the interests of a theological theory as in the interests of a physical theory.

Nor, even if Dr. Moberly's doctrine of personality be granted, does it seem that much is gained for his doctrine of vicarious penitence. So far as ordinary experience can be a guide, vicarious penitence seems to be even less within the bounds of moral experience than vicarious punishment. Nor can penitence atone for sin. To the judgment of the plain mind, the great human need of atonement seems to be the imperative thing that it is just because penitence is not enough.

Dr. Moberly's work, after all, will impress many of his readers as but another proof, if one were required, of the impossibility of reasoning out to the full any theory of the atonement. At the best, his doctrine of personality is a way of expressing the truth that the relation of God to human souls is, for our minds, essentially transcendent. When we begin to think of God as the ultimate One in whom all souls are included we pass into the realm of mysticism.

But what thus eludes the grasp of exact thinking may be felt and known in experience. The death of Christ has in fact—it is a fact which has stood the test of ages—a universal efficacy. It can to-day, as in the time of St. Paul,

take up into itself the lives of men, and become for them a death to sin and the source of a new life unto righteousness. In the power of Christ's resurrection, in the fellowship of His sufferings, man can attain to an experienced, if not an understood, atonement.

CHAPTER VIII

FUTURE LIFE

We have seen, from the very nature of the problem presented by moral evil as it exists in the world, that the atonement must be essentially a transcendent, or supernatural, fact. It cannot be fully explicable in terms of the categories which belong to our natural, or even our moral, experience. But though our intellects may find it impossible to construct a complete theory, the truth of the atonement is conveyed to our hearts by the sacrifice of the cross of Christ in a way which corresponds most perfectly to our spiritual needs. The Good Friday message is, that what man cannot even think how to do, God has accomplished. It is an assurance that there is a sphere in which the things impossible with men are not only possible, but actually done.

When we turn from the death of Christ to the gladness of the Easter morning, we find an element of exactly the same kind.

Common sense, when it endeavours to grapple with the question of a future life, finds itself completely puzzled. On the one hand, there are needs within us, needs of the most imperative kind, which demand, for their satisfaction, a belief in a future existence. Apart from such a future, there is an intolerable incompleteness about our life in this world. As spiritual beings we cannot regard ourselves as mere passing stages in a universal process which is working towards some result in which we have no personal share. Nor can our moral nature be content to think that the sufferings of the good, the frequent instances of injustice, the triumphs of evil, can represent

the final verdict of the universe; nor that any vindication of the right could take place apart from the individuality of those who suffered the wrong.

But, on the other hand, how can we conceive a future life which would give the completeness we demand? A doctrine of the immortality of the soul yields no satisfaction. Soul apart from body must lack fulness, content, variety. A world of shades is no heaven to desire. So antiquity felt, and felt rightly.

> "I had rather live the servile hind for hire
> Than sovereign empire hold o'er all the shades."

If such a doctrine contemplates an eternity of disembodied existence, it certainly contains no promise of bliss. If it supposes transmigration, continual re-birth into this life, the Buddhist *Nirvana* becomes man's highest hope. It cannot be denied that there is an extraordinary completeness about the Eastern conception. In its own way it solves most of the problems. The doctrine of *karma*, according to which the net moral result of each man's life becomes the starting-point of a new finite existence, which, in its turn, yields a result, is an amazingly subtle solution of that problem of moral incompleteness which has just been pointed out. But the whole creed is based on pessimism. It springs from the belief that all finite and personal forms of existence are essentially evil. Its hope is the extinction of the finite and personal.

But if the conception of the immortality of the soul fails to satisfy, what is to be said of the life which many Christian people seem to present to themselves as their hope for the future, a bodily life much the same in its conditions as our life in this world, but purified from sin and pain? It is not too much to say that it is only the mystery which surrounds the whole subject and the indefiniteness of the popular conception which prevent the impossibility of this view being immediately apparent. Even if it were possible, such an immortality would be no blessing. As we are situated here, all that is immediate

in our experience is essentially finite. We have sensations and emotions which possess an intense reality, but they are all fugitive. It is with these vivid but fugitive impressions that our joys are most intimately associated. When we search for a permanent element we find it only in abstract conceptions, which, taken by themselves, are the dry husks of life. Science deals mainly with these conceptions. It used to find permanence in two physical elements only—matter and energy. Now it is doubting the permanence of the former and suspecting that the energy of the universe is probably the only persistent thing. Yet, can we call this energy a thing? We turn to any text-book of science and look for a definition. We read: energy is capacity for doing work. It is at once clear that we are dealing with a scientific abstraction. In the concrete, energy appears as the changeful, not as the permanent. So it is with all our concrete experiences. The truth is that our life here is a continual struggle after satisfactions which, when gained, are found to be fugitive. And this is true even apart from the pain and sin which are so blended with our life.

The texture of our experience, then, is such that it can yield no permanent satisfaction. This is essentially its nature. Here is the old truth seen so clearly by psalmist and sage. "Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain. He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them." "I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and behold all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun." So it must be, when an effort is made to find the permanent in what is, in its very nature, fleeting. Therefore, it is clear, a world, a life, in which experience would assume the same essential shape which it possesses in this life could not provide scope for an eternal existence.

Yet man has certain possessions which pass beyond the finite: his spirit, or self, which is for him the true permanent, relatively to his fleeting experience; love which embraces other spirits and struggles ceaselessly against

change and death ; a capacity for joy which is never satisfied with the fleeting enjoyments of time ; hope which reaches out beyond the utmost which this life can afford ; a recognition of the good which finds all the good available in this world imperfect. These possessions, which present themselves to us rather as capacities or potentialities than as positive satisfactions or actualities, contrast in the strongest way with that fugitive experience which belongs to our conditions of existence in this world.

When we turn to the New Testament and scrutinise closely the doctrines of a future life which it presents to us, we find that the two opposite difficulties which we have just considered are avoided in a manner which is quite extraordinary. But it is not enough to say that they are avoided. A more accurate account of the matter would be that the New Testament doctrine escapes them by rising above them. In what follows it must be remembered that we are discussing the future life in the full sense of the term, the life which begins with the resurrection. We have to do with the doctrine of the Easter message, and not with the problem of the intermediate state.

In the New Testament a developed doctrine is to be found only in certain of the Epistles of St. Paul. The Gospels give us the fact of our Lord's resurrection. The whole New Testament expresses the hope founded on that fact. For a doctrine we must go to St. Paul, and especially to his two Epistles to the Corinthians.

There is no passage of Holy Scripture more familiar, nor more impressive by reason of its associations, than the fifteenth chapter of the first of these Epistles. Yet it is amazing how little its sublime teaching has availed to prevent those misunderstandings which result from the supposition that the resurrection means the mere re-animation of our earthly bodies. St. Paul's teaching is absolutely clear that the resurrection is the entering into new and higher conditions of existence. The conception of the spiritual body implies this, whatever its full significance may be.

From the material point of view, personal identity does

not consist in the identity of the particles of which the body is composed. Nor does it even consist in identity of arrangement. All it implies is continuity. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that thought is impossible apart from a special kind of arrangement of material particles, what would then be required for personal identity would be that the arrangement for each moment of personal existence should be so related to the arrangement for the next as to produce, or make possible, a certain order of relationship between the corresponding thoughts. This consideration disposes at once of all the objections to the idea of a bodily resurrection which have been urged by the more popular exponents of scepticism. It even gets over difficulties which such writers as the late Professor Tyndall regarded as insuperable.

How much more are we lifted out of the realm in which such objections have weight by St. Paul's doctrine of the spiritual body? As he himself tells us, the resurrection means the entering into a higher state of existence in which our bodies—that is, the sum total of those powers which form our means of connexion with the world—shall undergo complete transformation without loss of continuity.[1]

In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians we find this teaching in a still more highly developed shape. "We know," he writes, "that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." Here the reference is clearly to the spiritual or resurrection body. In implicit contrast to the earthly body, it is characterised as eternal and in the heavens—that is, it belongs to a state of being higher than that in which we now live. But St. Paul proceeds to express himself even more definitely as to the relation between the earthly body and the resurrection body. "For verily in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be un-

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 42–45 and 51–56.

clothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life."

These are words of extraordinary concentration. It is usual to find in them a reference to the hope that Christ would return to earth in the lifetime of the Apostle, and thus to explain the strong and emphatic expression "clothed upon," as meaning that the resurrection body would be, as it were, put on as an outer garment over the earthly body, and so "what is mortal" (the mortal element) be swallowed up of life. If this be accepted, it does not exclude, but rather strengthens, the interpretation which finds in these words a distinct doctrine of the relation which the resurrection body bears to the earthly body. The body, it must be considered, is the connecting link between the spirit and the world. When, therefore, we compare or contrast the resurrection body and the earthly body, we are really comparing or contrasting two modes of existence —the life in this world and the life of the eternal world. Each body corresponds to, and is representative of, the whole state of being to which it belongs. Again, St. Paul has very distinctly in his mind a double contrast. The future life is contrasted first, with our bodily life in this world; secondly, with a state of disembodied existence. If our earthly life is imperfect and unsatisfying because it is essentially corruptible and mortal—that is, fugitive and perishing—in its nature, a disembodied state is unsatisfying because it is a condition of "nakedness." It is stripped of its garment of vivid actuality. Therefore St. Paul says, "Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon."

What, then, is St. Paul's doctrine? It is just this: at the resurrection there shall supervene upon the lower modes of existence (the life of this world or the disembodied state) a life of higher reality. In that higher reality all the conditions of being which make this life imperfect and unsatisfying shall be transmuted and disappear. The mortal shall be swallowed up of life. We shall not be unclothed, but clothed upon. We shall not lose connexion with the universe around us; we shall gain a

vastly fuller and more perfect connexion, a richer and larger life. The eternal shall descend upon the temporal, the heavenly upon the earthly, and effect a glorious transformation.

And here we shall find our thoughts greatly assisted by that conception of *degrees of reality* which we found so useful when considering the doctrine of the Atonement. The future life must be higher in the scale of reality than this life. When this distinction has been fully grasped, it becomes impossible to regard the eternal world as a region of the material universe. The endeavour to locate "heaven," to imagine, for example, that it is some great central sphere round which all the celestial bodies, as they are revealed to us by modern astronomy, revolve in their courses, is at once seen to be futile. As the old idea of an upper world above the blue dome of the firmament had to vanish at the advent of the Copernican doctrine, so will every physical or quasi-physical conception of heaven be found, sooner or later, inadequate or impossible. To those who are familiar with the tendencies of modern thought, both scientific and philosophical, this fact is perfectly obvious. But instead of being a subject for regret or a cause of doubt, it should be a reason for profound hopefulness and restored confidence. For modern thought yields a conception which more than gives back all that the Copernican astronomy took away. Can anything be more suggestive of despair than a retreating heaven, a heaven which disappears farther and farther into the depths of space as scientific methods of investigation increase in power, a heaven which flies before the telescope and the spectroscope? What becomes of the near heaven and the ever-present God, which are so essential to our Christian faith?

When the conception of degrees of reality has been grasped, these difficulties vanish. The eternal world lies, not beyond the stars, but behind the veil. And the veil is that very world of space and time in which our present existence is passed. Yet this is perhaps a misleading mode of representation. St. Paul's language corresponds far

more nearly to a just expression of the relation between the temporal and the eternal: "Not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon; that the mortal may be swallowed up of life." Here we are led to think of the eternal as supervening upon the temporal, assimilating and transmuting it. Thus, instead of the eternal world being a region of the world in space and time, an element in the temporal, we are taught that the temporal is, rather, to be regarded as an element in the eternal—an element which must ultimately be wholly absorbed and resolved in the fuller reality.

Such a conception of the future life is essentially spiritual, because it depends on a view of the universe which is essentially spiritual. But it does not, therefore, throw any doubt on the resurrection of the body. On the contrary, this is the very truth which it secures. It is as far removed as possible from a mere doctrine of the immortality of the soul. It rests in no disembodied condition. Interpreted in terms of modern philosophical conceptions, it teaches us to think of a mode of existence far more concrete than our present life, and in far richer and fuller relationship to all that is most real in the universe. And not only so, but it indicates the identity of the body, so far as a body can be possessed of identity. For it implies that our present connexion with the universe through the body shall be, not lost, but resolved into that which forms its proper fulfilment. The continuity which, as we have seen, is the only meaning of identity as applied to a body, shall not merely be preserved, but attain its full realisation.

Everything in the accounts which the Gospels give us of the circumstances of our Lord's resurrection agrees with these conclusions. The disappearance of His body, the napkin that was upon His head being found "rolled up" in the very form in which it was bound upon Him (a fact to which much attention has been given of recent years), points to that "clothing upon" of the spiritual body, that supervening of the higher conditions upon the lower, involving the "swallowing up," or transmutation, of

the latter, of which St. Paul teaches us. Again, all the appearances of our Lord after His resurrection imply a relation of His body to earthly modes of existence other and higher than that to which we are accustomed. These facts have often been observed. It must be confessed, however, that it is difficult to draw universal conclusions from all such circumstances, because, though our Lord's resurrection is the assurance of our own future resurrection and the greatest of all the facts that our minds can deal with in attempting to reach a tenable doctrine of the future life, we have to remember that His case was in some very important respects unique.

For example, the disappearance of our Lord's body implies that the very particles of that material organism which was laid in the tomb were in some way concerned in, or affected by, the great change from death to life. It is certainly not necessary to infer that the very particles of every body which is laid in the grave must be, in some way, involved in the final resurrection. Our Lord's body was not mingled with the dust of the earth. It was thus, in its circumstances, set apart from our bodies. Further, it was necessary that the very material organism which was His should not remain in the tomb, but be involved in His resurrection, if His disciples were to gain a full conviction that He was no longer dead, but risen and living. The taking up of His very flesh into the new life was essential to the creation of that glorious faith which has ever since been the life of the Church.

It is surely clear from all that has come before us, that neither our Christian faith nor our human needs can be satisfied with any doctrine of a future life less than that supernatural creed which the Church has held ever since the first proclamation of the Gospel. And further, if our thoughts have been directed aright, the teaching of St. Paul is more truly in harmony with the tendencies of the higher thought of our own age than is any doctrine of the immortality of the soul. If there be such a thing at all as an eternal world, it must be transcendent. In relation to this world, the mode of existence which belongs to it must

be essentially supernatural. And the character of this supernaturalness must be, from our present point of view, just this, that the life of that world must be more real, and therefore more concrete, than the experience which forms the texture of our earthly existence.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRINITY

All that we have been led to think as to the supernaturalness, or transcendence, which marks the Christian solution of the great theological problems applies to that supreme doctrine which has always been regarded as the essence of the catholic faith. In modern times it has been too little considered that the doctrine of the Trinity must be organically related to all that is essential in the Christian creed. For many this great doctrine is either a thesis to be proved by texts from Holy Scripture or a tradition which must be preserved at all costs. For others, more reflective, it is discerned to be essential as a safeguard of the Divinity of our Lord. With but few does it take its rightful place as the supreme principle, the highest truth, in the light of which all lower truths become clearer, being exhibited in their mutual relationship. Yet, if the doctrine be true, this must be its character; for knowledge about God must be the highest knowledge. If we could know God perfectly, we could know everything perfectly; we should be able to see, as it were, the plan of the universe lying, like a map, before us. This is the end towards which most philosophies have struggled. Believing that there must be some universal plan or system in things, men have sought for the principles which give that system its unity, and when they have convinced themselves that they approached a solution of the problem, they have found themselves committed to a theology.

But the fact is that this struggle has never been completely successful. From the highest point of view, philosophy

has been a failure. Continually striving to reduce the sum total of things to an intelligible system, it has always found itself baffled by elements which refused to take their place in the scheme of thought which seemed to be imperatively required by other elements. Philosophy is the endeavour to think out the universe—that is, it is the effort to make the principles of human thought serve for the complete explanation of all things. It is, in truth, the attempt to measure God by a human standard, to make the categories which belong to our experience embrace the whole universe. And just for this reason philosophy has been, from the highest point of view, a failure. It has not failed utterly, as some think, for it has obtained certain results, discovered certain methods, and overthrown many idols. But it has not succeeded in its great endeavour to reach the highest of all points of view, and from thence to behold all the realms of being spread out before it. In other words, it has not attained to a complete definition of the nature of God. The failure of philosophy simply means that God is too great for our thoughts to comprehend Him.

Are we, then, to take refuge in agnosticism? This is too easy and hasty a way of disposing of so great a question. It does not follow, because we cannot know all about God, that we can know nothing about Him. When Mr. Herbert Spencer concluded that "the power which the universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable," he omitted to notice that in reaching that conclusion he had asserted some degree of knowledge about God, and that the very conclusion itself is a contradiction in terms. His whole argument is based on the fact that when we come to reason about God we find ourselves inevitably involved in contradiction. But, as Hegel taught us long ago, such contradictions are a proof, not of falsehood, but of incompleteness. Hegel, no doubt, imagined he had discovered the way in which all the contradictions of our finite thinking may be shown to be resolved in the unity of higher principles, and so thought be found capable at its highest point of grasping the Infinite Reality. In this great adventure, it is not too much to say, he has not been justified by more recent investigation.

The human spirit has not yet found wings by which to soar above the highest heights of heaven.

The problem which no reasoning can solve is how to reconcile in one consistent scheme of thought the freedom of the human spirit with the freedom of the Divine. It is an old problem, and one which assumes a different shape in every age and with every movement of the time spirit. Its most striking manifestations take place in the sphere of the moral consciousness and in connexion with practical life; but it makes its appearance equally in the sphere of knowledge, and confounds the efforts of the epistemologist.

Metaphysical study in the nineteenth century was mainly remarkable for the emergence of the principle of personality or selfhood. The idealist criticism of experience subsumed all the forms and categories of knowledge under this one supreme principle. Not only so, but knowledge appeared as a process of creation, so that the subject, or self, seemed, in the exercise of its freedom, to produce all that it knows. The world, as I know it, is simply my experience, and my experience exists because it is *my* experience.

Here, then, is a great proof of a personal Deity. The world exists apart from my experience of it. No sane person can deny that statement. But it is still the world that I know, and therefore essentially an experience. Whose experience? is the question which then becomes inevitable, and the answer is, God's. This mode of thinking has been presented in many ways which are all at heart the same. It has had great power over many of the best and most thoughtful minds in recent times. Yet it involves an inconsistency which makes the thinker suspect the presence of some difficulty which has not been fully dealt with. For, first, there is the rejection of common sense when it assures us of the independent existence of the world as we know it; and, secondly, there is the acceptance of the testimony of common sense as to that very independence when we wish to escape from the difficulty in which our rejection has placed us.

Strictly speaking, the idealist argument should land us in subjective idealism—the doctrine that all the world is a

private possession of mine, a phantasmagoria which ceases to exist when I become unconscious. Sanity forbids the inference, and therefore we assert the existence of an Eternal Spirit other and greater than ourselves. But in making the assertion, we have, on the principles of idealism, annihilated the human spirit. The "I" that knows becomes a phase or aspect of the great universal "I" which gives being to all things. Man loses his personality. We have to choose, in fact, between an assertion of man which annihilates God and an assertion of God which annihilates man.

Every student of modern philosophical literature knows how this difficulty has played havoc with the theories of the idealists. The great problem in all theories of knowledge is to bring together the individual and the universal points of view, or, in other words, to harmonise the human and the Divine. When the individual human spirit is taken as the principle of investigation, we find ourselves enclosed in a circle from which there is no logical way of escape; we are compelled to identify self and the world. When, on the other hand, by a *tour de force*, we endeavour to view the world from the Divine point of view, regarding the Deity as Infinite Personality, we can discover no place for human or finite personality.

In the latter case the world is regarded as a system, a great and perfectly articulated complex of relations, deriving its unity from the central personality which gives it being. If we are to think of God as just one Person, we gain a conception of the universe as a perfectly rational whole; but we must deny the existence of all other persons, for every other person is a centre of unification (or rationality) which stands over against the supreme centre in an independence which cannot be overcome.

The dilemma which thus comes to light is not to be regarded as pointing to a defect peculiar to the idealistic mode of approaching the great problem. It is inherent in every such endeavour of the human mind.

This fact emerges far more evidently when we turn from the theory of knowledge to the consideration of the practi-

cal side of human activity. It is here that all the great overwhelming problems which have from the earliest periods of reflective thought confounded the human intelligence make their appearance. How is human will to be harmonised with Divine will? How can fate or necessity coexist with human freedom? How can there be opposition to the will of God? If God is righteous and omnipotent, how is unrighteousness possible? Or, again, if God is omniscient, how can man's will be free? God's foreknowledge and the independence of human choice seem wholly irreconcilable.

All such questions culminate in the great problem of evil. And this problem, let it be noted, is not merely concerning the origin of evil, but rather the existence of evil. That evil should be at all is the greatest of all puzzles. Neither on rational nor on moral grounds is it capable of explanation. We can indeed see that the possibility of choosing the good necessarily implies the possibility of choosing the evil. If there is to be such a thing as goodness in finite beings, there must be freedom, for a goodness which is not freely chosen is not true goodness at all. Actions which are not due to the self-determination of the will have no moral quality; therefore, when goodness became possible in the world, evil also became possible. Looking at the question from the point of view of our Christian conception of God, we realise that the great Father seeks for the willing obedience of children, not the mechanical service of slaves or automata: and we understand that, if there is to be a sphere in which this willing service can be yielded to God, the possibility of disobedience is inevitable. Within the region, that is, of our moral experience, we find sufficient grounds for the permission of evil. But this in no sense disposes of the great ultimate problem, for the question at once assumes this form: How is our moral experience to be reconciled with reason? How are our convictions about God to be harmonised with our convictions about our own life?

This whole series of problems, which culminates in the problem of evil, arises, then, out of that final and ultimate

difficulty which we have had in view all along. The freedom of the will is the assertion of personality on its practical side. Freedom is essentially self-determination. It is the action characteristic of the self or person. In will, personality asserts itself in a manner more fully expressive of its proper nature than in knowledge, and therefore it is in connexion with the exercise of the will that the opposition between the human personality and the Divine becomes most apparent, and the difficulties arising from it most obviously insuperable.

It is clear that we are here face to face with the ultimate problem which springs from the endeavour to think of God in the terms supplied by our human experience. We have been landed in this dilemma simply because we have attempted to measure God by a human standard. The standard is the best we have got for the purpose, and we are therefore bound to make the attempt; but when we reflect on its nature, we must not be surprised at its failure. Our duty is neither to despair nor to presume, but patiently to endeavour to discover the precise point at which our measurement fails, and then draw the necessary conclusion.

If there has been any degree of soundness in the line of thought which we have pursued, it has brought us to this—that the principle of personality, as we are aware of it in ourselves, is not good enough, not high enough in the scale of principles, to represent the ultimate nature of God. It is the best we have got, yet it is not good enough. Are we, then, to deny the personality of God? Certainly not, for our own personality is revealed to us as the self-conscious subject in relation to a world of experience—an experience which can have no existence apart from such a relation; and if we are to believe in the reality of the world revealed in our experience, we must believe in an infinite subject which embraces both us and our experience. What we are led to is that God is personal—that is, self-conscious, and self-determined—but that this description, great and true as it must be, is not great enough nor true enough to express the final nature of His being.

Here again is presented to our minds the thought which

we found so useful when considering the problems of atonement and of the future life—the conception of *degrees of reality*. God is the most real of all beings. He stands at the summit of reality. The conceptions to which we attain are those which belong to our own position in the scale, and the reality which we ourselves possess is inferior —below the highest. For us, personality expresses the furthest point of our own attainment as real beings; it is therefore the best that we have and the most worthy of all our notions as a description of the highest. But it is not adequate. It is true, but not complete.

We must, then, say that God is personal, but that He is more than personal. There is in Him some principle higher than the highest known to us.

When we have reached this conclusion it may seem that we have said all that can be said, if the argument here set forth be sound. But further thought will show that there is a great deal more which must be considered. There are principles of our thinking which we must obey, even when we are dealing with questions which pass out of the range of our intelligence. The most important of these is the principle of unity. No matter what view we may take of the ultimate reality, we must hold it to be One. It is impossible to end in a disconnected multiplicity. Every advance in our conscious life is towards unification. All our thoughts rest upon the belief in a final unity. Philosophy in all its forms is the effort to reach that great end. Science, in its dealing with the infinite variety of the world, moves at every step of its progress towards the same goal. In our practical life we find the same principle at work. The difference between sanity and madness is the difference between a life which is in harmony with itself and one which is disorganised. The single eye and the pure heart are those which are unwavering in their devotion to the good. The double-minded man, who tries to serve God and mammon, or God and self, is in the way towards every evil. Even the sinner who has some fixity of purpose acquires strength. The dominance of the principle of unity may be shown by reference to every department of activity.

It is therefore plain that when we have concluded that the final truth of the Divine nature is superpersonal, we are compelled by those faculties which have conducted us to that conclusion to go at least one step further, and declare that in His ultimate nature God is one. He is not one person, for if that were so He would be but one among many—one limited by us as we limit one another. He is, rather, personal, and at the same time a unity which transcends personality.

And here we touch on another aspect of personality as it is known to us. If, in his relation to the world of his experience, each human person, as knowing and willing subject, occupies a position of universal significance, in his relation to other minds, his position is one of strict limitation. All human beings limit one another, and together form a social universe. Each is but one among many. And there is no principle in personality which can so transcend the multitude of persons as to bring all into harmony. No one human spirit can attain either a point of view from which all minds can be seen as united in a single rational system or a position from which all wills can be subordinated to one supreme end. We can neither see other minds from within nor control other wills by any direct agency. Neither reason nor will as they exist in us possesses such transcendent power. Nor, again, can we even imagine reason or will to possess power of that kind in any other being. If there be power of that kind, it must be on a higher level of being than any to which we can attain.

Now, we cannot believe that the Infinite Spirit is one among a multitude of beings so limited. He must be the all-inclusive One. In Him all that, for us, hangs disconnected and incomplete must reach an ultimate unification and completion. And if this be so, He must be the most concrete of all.

Owing to the abstract terms in which metaphysical conceptions are expressed, we have fallen too much into the misleading habit of identifying the spiritual with the abstract. The mistake is a serious one. It has greatly

detracted from the value of philosophical studies. The truth is, that the spiritual is both more real and more concrete than the material. The best way to present this to our minds is to consider that every material thing that we know is but an element in our experience, and that our experience, when taken as a whole, is essentially spiritual. It is as possessing experience that man knows himself as a spiritual being. Now, the step from the material to the spiritual, as a step from the less real and the less concrete to the more real and the more concrete, helps us to understand the possibility of another step to something more real and more concrete still. In us the spiritual learns to know itself as the personal, and it is as personal that we find ourselves to be more real and more concrete than the material things which we know as elements in our experience. But when we have thus understood our position as personal beings, we make the discovery that we are but units in a multitude, and that there is in us no power to unify this multiplicity in which we ourselves exist as elements. To effect this final unification there is need of some ultimate principle more real and more concrete than we are, by means of which the whole universe may be brought into harmony. And where is this superpersonal and ultimate unity to be found but in God? "In Him we live and move and have our being."

This final step, to which we are thus led as the inevitable result of following fearlessly the path indicated by the failure of the idealistic philosophy, sets us face to face with a supernatural principle in the strictest sense of the term. We learn that we must encounter the supernatural whenever we come at all into close contact with any problem which concerns the ways in which God overcomes the opposition of human souls to Himself. We can see at once why such truths as the Incarnation and the Atonement cannot be fully rationalised. We can also see reason for suspecting, in spite of the prejudices of our own time, that revelation, in the strict sense of the term, may have need of miracles.

But the greatest gain that we derive from our conclusion is that it enables us to see in the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity the very central principle of Christian theology and of supernatural religion. The doctrine of the Trinity is the necessary outcome of reflection upon the revelation of God in Christ. In manifesting Himself our Lord revealed both the Father and the Son. By His appeal to the inner witness to the truth in the heart He revealed the Spirit. Apart from this great revelation the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity could never have come to light. It is vain indeed for any one to endeavour to prove it by purely metaphysical reasonings. Nowadays such reasonings, when taken by themselves, leave us with little more than a vague sense of mystery.

But when, with the Christian doctrine in our minds, we turn round upon the conclusions to which we were led, we find them filled with meaning. The essence of the doctrine of the Trinity is that God is not just one Person. In Him personality is a subordinate principle. In His ultimate nature His unity is superpersonal. It is useless to attempt to conjure with the word *person*, and to seek to give it, in its application to the Persons of the Godhead, a meaning less clear and definite than it possesses when applied to man. For here we are dealing, not with abstract conceptions, but with facts. When we study the life of Christ we find ourselves face to face with the most strongly defined Personality in history, One in whom personal distinctness is as clearly marked as it could possibly be, One who distinguishes Himself, as a Person, from the Father, and yet declares His unity with the Father.

To sum up such teachings we need precisely such a form as that which we have seen to be supplied by the conclusions which we were able to derive from the failure of philosophy and the tendencies of modern thought. Certainly, if modern thought has taught us anything on this subject, it is that there is no place for the old Unitarian conception. A solitary Person, enthroned above the universe, a lonely Sovereign in the skies, is now an impossible conception. Most of the arguments on which philoso-

phical agnosticism relies are aimed at this doctrine, and not at the Christian conception. There is, indeed, a place for agnosticism in the Christian creed, for agnosticism is just the assertion that the highest truths are above the reach of our human reason. When the agnostic movement of thought has been purged of its extravagance, we may find that it has for man a message of the utmost importance. For is it not the recognition by a whole school of scientific minds that there is a realm, and that the highest of all, which, relatively to the world of physical causes, is essentially supernatural?

It is inevitable that the hasty critic of the view which has just been presented should bring against it the charge of Tritheism. It will be said that in so distinguishing the Divine Persons and in so emphasising the finality, for human thought, of the unity of personality, we are landing ourselves hopelessly in heresy. Also it will be said that the word *person* as originally employed in theology, had no such meaning, and that to read into it the connotation which it has acquired in recent philosophy is a serious error.

In regard to the second of these objections it is surely sufficient to point out that the development of human thought along its main lines must be expected to throw fresh light on ancient problems, and that it is but another proof of the working of Divine providence in history if it be found that the language which naturally expressed the Christian thought of the earlier centuries is capable of expanding so as to include and convey the thought to which the Christian mind has attained under the influence of modern philosophy. Further, the discussion as to the meaning of words is wholly futile unless it be accompanied by a constant reference to the facts to which the words refer. Now there can be little doubt that, for us at the present day, the figure of Jesus Christ stands out with a personal distinctness, a definiteness of outline, which was not visible to the Christian thinkers of earlier periods. That He, in His personality, should be a mere aspect or representation of some other Being is impossible. It is

not too much to say that He is the most distinct Person in all history.

The charge of Tritheism is more serious and more vital. Yet it is based on an essential misunderstanding. If there be, as we maintain, a superpersonal Unity, which is the ultimate Being, the highest and truest form of all that is, then its Unity must be far more concrete and more intimate than the unity of Personality; for it is the Highest Reality which includes all other realities. Just as a personal spirit in his experience includes and sums up all those lower forms of being which are elements in his experience, so does the Ultimate One, the Highest Reality, include and sum up all persons. His Unity is therefore the most concrete of all. Compared with it, the unity of personality is a mere shadow.

Further, it is only by some such unity as this that the freedom of the individual can be preserved. The relation between the spiritual and the material shows us that a unity which is higher in the order of being can control things belonging to a lower order without in any way interfering with the laws which govern them. Thus, as we saw above, the will of man can use the forces of nature and guide them with a view to human purposes without in any way breaking the laws of nature. So it is that all human work is done. Analogy teaches us that if there be a principle of unity—as we have seen reason to believe that there is—higher in the order of being than the principle of personality, its nature will be such that it will include all persons in its own higher life and subordinate them to itself without in any way destroying the nature that properly belongs to them. That is, their freedom—for that is the essential of personal existence—will be preserved to them intact; and, at the same time, the true purpose of their being will be realised. How this can be, it is impossible for us to say, for our minds cannot rise to this highest level; but that it must be is surely the teaching of the analogy which has just been indicated; and is—a still more important truth—the implication of all that is profoundest in life and faith.

Psychologists and mystics are engaged, at the present time, in an eager effort to break through the boundaries of personal existence. The great body of new material which has been obtained by observation in many fields of psychical experience in recent years has had a confusing effect on the minds of many thinkers. But, as already pointed out, it is a mistake to be shaken from our hold upon truths of which we have once become assured, because we have grasped new facts and do not at once see how to comprehend both. Also, it is rash to deny such a truth as the unity of personality because it turns out to be so much greater, and so much more various in its relation to the world, than we suspected at first.

However these controversies may be settled finally, there has come to light no reason why we should turn away from that result to which the use of the critical method in philosophy—that great method which we owe to Kant—led modern thought so decisively. Nor should the students of mysticism complain; for, when we come to deal with the things which belong to that upper realm of being in which human souls come into relation with God, our thoughts must be essentially mystical. They must deal, that is, with things which are too great for them, and must be content to acknowledge the inadequacy of purely rational methods of approaching the Supreme. They must use the language of the lower world as dim shadows of that upper world for which they possess no truly fitting expression. And their final resting-place must be in a Unity which, just because it is the greatest and most comprehensive of all, is the most ineffable.

CHAPTER X

THE SUPERNATURAL IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

Two worlds meet in the life of man: the lower world of physical sequence, the world of natural causation, and the upper world of freedom, of spiritual reality. As possessing a bodily frame which is at all points in contact with the natural order of things, and is itself a natural product, man belongs to the former; as a free spirit, having his place in the community of spirits, he belongs to the latter. The former is pervaded by natural law and the rule of necessity; the latter owns, as its highest principle, the rule of love.

There has already become visible to us, from several points of view, the truth that there is no conflict between these two worlds. The higher over-rules the lower, and that without in any way interfering with the settled order of things: freedom can control natural forces without breaking the laws under which they operate. In fact, it is the very existence of these laws which gives freedom her opportunity.

Thus, from one point of view, man belongs to nature; from another, he transcends nature; he is a supernatural being, possessing a wonderful control over natural forces, and he is a member of a community of beings similarly endowed.

It is essentially as belonging to this higher order of things that religious experiences come to us. Such experiences are therefore truly supernatural. They do not belong to the world of causation and necessity. They

may be mediated through that world, normally they are so mediated, but their essence is to belong to the world of spiritual, not of material, relationship.

But if we say no more than this, we do not remove religion from the ordinary sphere of humanity. For the relations between mind and mind, between will and will, which form the very texture of social life, are also, in this sense, supernatural. Though they are mediated through the world of physical cause and effect, in their essential character they belong to the higher world, the world of the spiritual. It is important to realise that, in this sense, the supernatural is always with us.

When we come to that part of life which belongs to religion, in the distinctive sense of the term, we have to think of a higher relationship still, the relation of the human spirit to God. Here again we see that, though the relationship belongs essentially to the higher order of reality, it is, in a vast number of cases, mediated through the lower. God's providence works through the ordinary succession of natural events, and produces its results without any breach of natural law. This we have reason to believe is the ordinary course of providential working; but the fact does not hinder its being, from the higher point of view, and as a relation between God and human souls, most truly supernatural.

The relationship between the human soul and God may, however, be traced in another manner. In his inner experience man finds himself in a world of spiritual experience. The contents of his consciousness appears, from the psychological point of view, as an illuminated circle on the surface of a vast ocean of psychical fact. The thoughts, feelings, and impulses which he possesses at any moment are related to an infinity of other thoughts, feelings, and impulses which lie outside the range of his immediate consciousness. Some of these elements may enter his conscious experience as circumstances change; but there remains always an illimitable region beyond his ken. Here, more intimately, we must believe man's life comes into relationship with God.

The experiences of this inner realm should be regarded as facts of which account must be taken—facts which demand recognition quite as much as those of the material world. And when we come to consider such of these facts as seem to belong more especially to our religious life, we find ourselves confronted with an immense range of human experience which must be recognised as holding a central position in the spiritual history of mankind. Let us think very briefly of some of the principal elements in religious experience.

First, we must recognise the sense which man possesses, or may possess, of the presence of God. To those who have a vivid realisation of the Divine presence, it seems as if it were a thing so necessary to the inner consciousness that none can altogether lack it. That God scans all the secrets of the soul, that the unuttered prayers which express the longings of our hearts are most certainly known to Him, that we can at any moment in our thoughts look to Him and be assured that we are in His presence, that He is aware of all that concerns us, and that though we may tell Him our needs He knows them better than we do ourselves: all this belongs, not to the belief of the religious man so much as to his consciousness. For such, the upward glance of the soul, seeking God and finding Him, is a constant experience.

A special quality is imparted to this experience of the Divine presence by the revelation of God which is given us in Christ. We learn to think of the Almighty as our Father in Heaven. This was the characteristic teaching of our Lord. But it was more than a teaching—it was a manifestation of His own consciousness. He realised the presence of God in a manner peculiar to Himself. In addition, He so spoke of God, and so brought His own consciousness of the Divine presence and character to bear on the souls of those who entered into sympathy with Him, that they came to think of God as He thought, and to feel not merely the greatness and awfulness of the holy presence in which they stood, but also the power and infinity of the Divine love.

Closely connected with this experience is the fact of prayer. Prayer, as a fact, is a thing of which account must be taken. In its essence, prayer is just that realisation of God's presence of which we have spoken. The going forth of the heart to Him, whether in vague longing or in definite petition, is based upon the consciousness of His presence. Just as we do not speak to a friend unless we are so convinced of his presence as to believe that he can hear us, so we do not address ourselves to God unless there is some real degree of the same conviction. Moreover, there must be also some degree of conviction as to His character. A God conceived as altogether alien and out of sympathy with us would be an impossible object of prayer.

When to this we add the consideration of prayer as a means of obtaining definite blessings, we find a new element of religious experience. Nothing but a real basis of fact can explain the conviction of all ages that prayer is answered. The testimony of humanity on this question cannot be brushed aside as worthless. Every Christian experience adds a new element to the witness. That prayers are answered, Christian people know. Some are answered through the operation of natural forces working according to natural law; some, through the operation of human wills; some, by means which are beyond our ken. But of this all Christian experience is assured: though the results may—at all events in many cases—be brought about by natural means, they are not mere results of natural forces, nor are they the effects which would have taken place if prayer had not been offered.

We have just seen that, in essence, prayer is the realisation of the presence and power of God, together with a conviction as to His character. How far, we may ask, do these elements in our religious experience depend on the Christian revelation? The Old Testament shows us many examples of very vivid realisation of the Divine presence and of very great thoughts as to God's providential dealing with men. It was in the strength of a great conviction as to God's sustaining power that the

heroes of Israel accomplished their great tasks. In what respect have we, who have learned of Christ, the advantage of them?

In considering this question we have to remember the very different intellectual atmosphere of the modern world. To the minds of the men of old every striking display of the forces of nature seemed an obvious manifestation of Divine power. The hurricane and the thunderstorm seemed unmistakable evidences of His reality. But modern science has for generations been engaged in the task of revealing natural phenomena as a great system working, apparently, in complete independence of personal intervention. The astronomer searches the depths of space, and finds neither God nor heaven. The geologist traces the history of the earth through millions of years, and finds proof of a slow development by means of natural causes. God seems to be driven out of His universe. Even the conception of a great Indwelling Spirit does not, by itself, give much relief. As we have seen, there is no sufficient proof that the end for which this Great Spirit is working is not something altogether remote and out of relation to our life. We may be but a passing stage in a process which aims at something very far beyond us.

In the light of this new knowledge the idea of the presence of God becomes vague and unsatisfying. It is surely worth our while to reflect that, taken by itself, the study of nature seems to lead to a colourless pantheism. So it would be but for an opposing factor. The effect of the life and death of Jesus and of the influence of His personality has been to give to mankind a conception of God so strong and so definite, so exalted in the moral sphere, and so persuasive through its realisation of all the goodness which our human nature hints at, that it is able to carry us through the time of intellectual difficulty. To those who have known Christ there is a moral compulsion to think of God in terms of the Divine-human Personality of the Gospels. It is surely a sign of the operation of an over-ruling Providence that in these modern days, when the need has become greatest, there has been given us a new

insight into the Gospel history. We have been able to realise Jesus Christ as a fact.

Now we find in the New Testament that the idea of the Divine presence undergoes a change. It is no longer merely that God is with His people, but that Christ is with them. "Lo, I am with you alway," is the great promise to the Church. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them," is the blessing pronounced upon the united action of Christian people. "I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you." "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." And corresponding to these expressions we have witness after witness in the Acts and Epistles that to those from whom Christ had been taken, so that they saw Him no more in the flesh, there was granted a sense of His presence in some spiritual way. Nor is this experience a mark of the first ages only. All the ages of Christian history afford instances. And in our own time countless souls can bear witness to the fact that for them Christ is not dead and gone, but a great living presence, the source of all the good that is in them.

The spiritual realities to which such experiences witness can be estimated also by their moral effects. As spiritual facts they satisfy some of the most imperative of human needs. As factors in man's moral life they display an efficacy which can be recognised even by those who view the world from a purely scientific point of view. Here is to be found a verification of the truth of religion. The moral value of religion is indeed the principle of the test which the world in general applies. When religious faith seems, in certain cases, to fail to yield the fruit of goodness, doubts creep into the most serious minds. The sins of Christendom form the strongest argument which the unbeliever possesses. The principle, "By their fruits ye shall know them" is, in practice, universally admitted.

Of recent years much stress has been laid on the fact of conversion. A wide survey of instances proves con-

clusively that it is possible for the moral state of a human soul to undergo a complete transformation in one great experience. Much careful labour has been given to the subject by recent psychology, and the fact cannot be doubted. Though it cannot be proved that Christian influences are the only ones which are capable of effecting this change, it is undoubtedly true that Christian experience is peculiarly rich in instances of it. Moreover, in Christian experience, the connexion between the religious influence and the moral effect is very close and very striking. That habits of long standing can be eradicated, that souls filled with evil thoughts can be cleansed, that the whole course of the life can be set in a new direction, as the effect of a strong impression produced by some power which works through Christian faith, can no longer be denied. Here is evidence of the utmost importance.

The new psychology also gives us the means of connecting sudden conversion with that gradual development or growth which is the more normal form of Christian experience. It is an error to set one kind of spiritual change against another, and regard them as diverse. The truth is that the sudden change is due to a development taking place subconsciously. Spiritual forces working below the surface of the conscious life have, it may be through a lengthened process, so altered the balance of the character that it reaches a condition of instability, and at last, under the influence of a strong impression, accomplishes a complete revolution. The feelings and impulses which have dominated the conscious existence disappear, and others which have grown unseen come to light. The striking nature of such a change as this attracts attention, and those who have experienced it regard it as in a very special way an instance of Divine grace.

It is quite possible that here we do touch very closely the region in which Divine influences operate. For the subconscious series of changes seems to go on, to a very great degree, independently of the conscious activity of the subject; and there must be some directing agency. But it is surely a great mistake to suppose that where we can

trace the course of moral achievement, where we can detect its progress in the struggle with temptation and in the deliberate choice of the higher in preference to the lower rule of conduct, we should discern less of the Divine than in the hidden processes of the subconscious life.

A deeper search will show us that every fact of man's spiritual existence, every thought and feeling, every determination of the will, is based upon a conscious life larger than his own—a life which embraces his on every side, and by contact with which his spiritual being is sustained. The psychological inquiry of our day is showing more and more conclusively the immensity of the spiritual universe in which we dwell. We must therefore discern the hand of God in the conditions which make possible the moral decision of our conscious activity as well as in the influence which guides the development of subconscious tendencies.

Moreover, it is from our conscious experience that we learn that the power which thus enables us to attain to higher things is that to which our religious faith is directed. Having felt the uplifting power of faith in God, having known the strength which the mere thought of the love of Christ and His Divine self-sacrifice can impart, and realising also the insufficiency of the unassisted human will, we reason from what we have experienced of Divine power in our conscious life to that which lies beyond our ken. And it is in this moral efficacy of the Christian faith that we find the verification which completes that great conviction which has its source in our spiritual needs and in the recognition of that which alone can satisfy them.

CHAPTER XI

FAITH

NOTHING is commoner for those who find themselves puzzled by the multitude of questions which modern thought has raised than to give up the intellectual struggle and cast themselves on *Faith*. Here, they think, is a principle which cannot be assailed, for the very effort to assail it is a denial of it. The believer and the assailant have no common ground, therefore faith is a sure refuge. Also faith is a term which has behind it very noble traditions, very sacred associations. To suffer for faith, to cling to faith, to maintain the faith: these are heroic things.

On the other hand, to hold to faith, in defiance of reason, is not to escape altogether from difficulty; for it means that the mind and the soul are at war. When the scoffer defines faith as the faculty of believing what you know to be false, he puts his finger on the vital point. A faith which is in opposition to reason is in a precarious position after all. Is faith, then, to wait on reason, disputing each point, and holding herself in suspense until every question is settled. So many of the older apologists seemed to think. But surely it is obvious that such a faith as this would be no true faith, and would be, for practical purposes, of very little value. Bishop Butler taught us that probability is the guide of life, and that in Christian apologetics we must be content with that kind of certainty which we have in ordinary affairs. Yet it cannot be said that such probability, however useful as a justification after belief, would supply a sufficient source for that utter devotion of heart and life which Christ demands.

It is quite clear that faith as it actually exists is a prin-

ciple of extraordinary efficacy. Put it to a practical test. Suppose some great logician to enter an assembly of Christian people, and to prove to the satisfaction of the intellect of every one of them that their creed could not possibly be true, we know that they would one and all, with splendid irrationality, defy reason and cling to faith. Though silenced in argument and overwhelmed in the field of reason, they would yet hold tenaciously to their belief, with the conviction that, in His own good time, God would reveal the solution of the questions which they found so impossible to answer. If reason seems to be inconsistent with faith, there is always the supposition that there must be a mistake somewhere which will be discovered sooner or later. And this mistake when it comes to light will, of course, be found to be an error of reason, or to arise from the fact that reason is trying to do what is beyond her. So the believer assures himself, and the assurance is justifiable on grounds of experience; for the conclusions at which reason arrives very frequently require modification in the light of later or fuller knowledge. But here again the fixed point is given by faith, not by reason, for the mistake which is supposed to have taken place is an error of reason, or is due to an unsuspected limitation of reason.

Such considerations as these have led many to regard faith as a ground of assurance more fundamental than reason. There is a region apparently in which intellect is helpless, and must yield to another faculty possessed of far greater penetration into the deeper mysteries of being. This thought has exercised a great attraction upon many minds, and has inspired many philosophical adventures. It involves, however, a special difficulty which often escapes the notice of those who resort to it—a difficulty which was stated by Hegel in his criticism of Jacobi's philosophy.[1] If faith is a source of truth, or a means by which we become assured of truth, how far does its operation extend? What truths do we learn by means of faith? How much of truth can it supply? Does it teach us about God, or

[1] See Hegel, *Logic*, § 63.

does it yield to our inquiry the whole scheme of Christian theology? There are not many who will claim for faith the power to produce ready-made the whole Thirty-nine Articles, or the entire Westminster Confession. It will be recognised at once that the history of the production of such documents is known, and that they are, very largely, the result of the action of reason upon certain data. Most thinking people who claim for faith this special power of giving assurance as to truth will limit its province to the relation of the soul to God. Faith is said to be the soul's recognition of God. But careful consideration will show that no such statement as this really gets rid of the difficulty. How much truth about God does faith give us? Does it teach us the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, or does it assure us of the Unitarian creed? Does it give us an account of God's nature, or is it simply the assurance that God is? It is impossible to reduce to a definite statement any creed about God which can be certainly regarded as given to us by faith. For when dispute arises as to which creed is the real deliverance of faith, it will be found that the ultimate decision will rest not with faith, but with reason; for each side will in argument appeal to the arbitrament of the intelligence. It remains, then, that the only indisputable utterance of faith is simply this,—that God is.

But when we have arrived at this conclusion, we have only succeeded in emptying faith of all meaning or value. To maintain that God is, can be of no use at all to us unless we are able to say something of what He is. We must have some conception of His nature and character, or the statement of His existence is absolutely unmeaning. Mr. Herbert Spencer indeed hit upon the device of calling a thing God for the sole reason that nobody knows what it is,[1] but no theologian will venture to follow his example. In order to approach God in prayer, or to find in Him a refuge for our souls or a support in the time of trouble, we must be convinced not merely that He is, but that He knows all about us, and is willing to enter into sympathetic

[1] See Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 128, 1st edition.

relation with us; that is, we must believe in Him as a personal Being, possessing a character of which we are assured.

The true solution of the problem which thus presents itself is to be found by examining with more patience the place of faith in our actual experience, and by applying to it as to other principles the great idea of process or development. Faith is not to be regarded as a spiritual treasury in which will be found, when it is unlocked, a complete set of doctrines perfectly ready for theological use. It is rather a principle which must be appealed to when need arises, and which, like reason, requires continual adjustment and correction in its application to the problems of thought and life.

Science itself supplies an illustration, or rather an instance, of the application of the principle of faith which is, for purposes of modern thought, perhaps the simplest and most intelligible of all. Many of the most penetrating minds among recent thinkers have pointed out that the work of science in her investigation of the secrets of nature is based at every step upon faith.[1] There is no difficulty in framing a destructive criticism able to undermine the whole foundation of science; but such criticism succeeds at the expense of all that makes coherent thought possible. Therefore we reject it. The great faith that the world has a meaning must be maintained. Let us be clear, however, that it is a faith. Or, again, science achieves her great results by a continual exercise of trust. She goes upon the supposition that the universe is trustworthy. This is not at all a self-evident proposition. To the savage the world appears to be filled with capricious unaccountable forces. But science determines to believe in order, in law, in certainty; and in the strength of that great faith she prevails.

Nor is this faith which is the foundation of science different from the faith which religion demands. It is

[1] Fraser, *Philosophy of Theism*, Vol. II., Sect. V.; and Westcott *Gospel of Life*, pp. 28, 83, 2nd edition.

indeed the very same faith, though differently applied. In religion it is applied to the things of the spirit rather than to the phenomena of nature. Faith is the spirit of man assuming that the Supreme Power is trustworthy. Its essence is *Trust* as directed towards the Supreme.

Now the whole history of the exercise of religious faith seems to be the application of this principle to the needs and problems of the spiritual life as they arose. At first with many hesitations and uncertainties; at times with much turning back to lower views; but ever, as, in the providence of God, the circumstances of human life changed and developed, and there occurred new opportunities for faith, man was enabled to trust, and so there was gathered a harvest of beliefs, ways in which the relation of God to man found expression. Thus arose the creed.

It would be possible to show how every advance in religious faith, every response of the human soul to the revelation of God in nature and history, and in those more central parts of history which we regard as in a special sense Revelation, was due to a higher degree of trust in the Supreme. Man, confronted by the difficulties of life and of thought, finds that the only way to overcome is by confidence in God. To many at the present day the unfailing, unvarying, character of the laws of nature seems a sinister, indeed a terrible, fact. But what a want of faith such suspicion betrays! Rather, we should discern in this regularity of the laws of nature a great revelation of the character of God—a revelation which has been granted in response to faith. Here the trustworthiness of the Infinite is manifested.

So again, in the sphere of religious experience, the advance from polytheism to monotheism is an advance from a lower degree of faith to a higher. What more natural to the primitive mind than to regard all the confusions and oppositions which are evident in the world as due to the operation of a multitude of diverse and more or less discordant powers. It is surely the simplest possible solution of the difficulties of life. Yet it but transfers the confusion from the seen to the unseen, and provides no

real ground of confidence. It was a magnificent triumph of faith when man was able, in spite of all the discords of the world, to believe in the Supreme One. When this step was taken the whole level of religious thought was raised, and the way opened for a higher human life.

We have now been led to think of a continual and progressive revelation of God in human experience, and faith as trust receiving that revelation and dealing with it, and so attaining to those thoughts about God which constitute a creed. This whole mode of regarding the question yields a principle—namely this, that the higher and greater our thoughts of God are the truer they are. The greatest thoughts of God are the truest. This means simply that God is at the top in the scale of being. He is the highest of all realities. Here is the essence of the old *a priori* proof of the Being of God. To regard the Almighty as a physical force is absurd, for that is to think of Him as lower in the scale of being than man. In the same way every unworthy conception is overthrown.

The value of the principle which has thus come to light can, however, be better seen in its application to the central facts of the Christian revelation. To the Jews of His own time—those at least who were sensitive to spiritual things—our Lord appeared as "a teacher come from God." His life had a character so high in the moral scale that it was felt to be the manifestation of something different from ordinary humanity. At the same time, He taught with authority, He claimed to have a Divine mission, He displayed a consciousness of God other and higher than any possessed by even the greatest and holiest of prophets. The mighty works which filled His life set Him apart as one possessed of powers not wielded by man.

Yet this greatest and holiest of all men was involved in the most ceaseless struggle with the powers of the world and of evil. We watch Him going down to death, pursued by the malignity of the authorities of His own people, and refusing to extricate Himself from the antagonisms and sufferings in which He was involved. In His case the greatest and most perplexing of human problems is found

in its greatest intensity. When He died it must have seemed to His disciples that evil had overcome good. They saw the one utterly pure and spotless soul, the one will which was altogether consecrated to God, overwhelmed and crushed. The very goodness of their Master was the reason of His death. That death seemed to be the final triumph of evil.

With the morning of the resurrection came the victory of faith. Christ had by His death overcome death and brought life and immortality to light. And faith was able to rise to this great creed because she put the highest possible construction upon the life and death of Jesus. As the Christian consciousness came to itself and reflected more fully upon the facts, the creed as we now know it took shape. The doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement were the highest and greatest interpretation of which the facts were capable, and therefore they were the truest. It was necessary to believe in Jesus Christ as the revelation of God. How, then, was God revealed? In one who was humiliated, who suffered, who died the most awful death willingly, and who rose again. How could such events be explained except in terms of those very expressions which the Lord Himself had used, and by giving to those expressions the very fullest meaning which was possible? And so the Church learned to see, in the life and death of Christ, God Himself undertaking to deal with the supreme problem of human life, engaging the powers of evil, and overcoming them for man's sake. Thus the greatest of all difficulties, the blackest of this world's mysteries, was transformed into the brightest revelation of Divine love.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that "it became Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." The idea of the words "it became Him" is that the sufferings of Christ are in harmony with the greatness of God. To the common sense of mankind, apart from Christian teaching, this thought seems absurd. A crucified

God was to the ancients a subject of mockery. Yet the deeper and truer insight belongs to the Christian consciousness as represented by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. When we realise that the moral is essentially higher in the scale than the physical, and that the very highest degree of perfection which we can attribute to the Almighty is perfection in the moral sphere, we discern the power of the argument. That the Eternal Divine Logos should become incarnate and should humble Himself to the death of the cross seems unworthy of the greatness of God only so long as our minds are filled by unworthy conceptions of greatness. Such a degree of self-sacrifice surpasses all that man would or could undertake or accomplish in proportion as God surpasses man. It is just because God is so far above man that the work of Christ is in harmony with the greatness of God, and yet seems to the earthly mind too great a thing to be true. The very vastness of the gulf which divides the Eternal from finite man but makes the act of redemption the more worthy of the Divine greatness when that greatness is conceived in accordance with the teachings of our moral consciousness.

The same principle is implied in many of the most characteristic teachings of the New Testament. Thus, when St. John throws out, with magnificent daring, the great utterance, "God is Love," he carries conviction at once to those whose minds have been opened by the influence of the Christian revelation. The very greatness of the statement reveals its truth. So also with many—and in a sense with all—of our Lord's teachings. The shock of surprise at the sublime height from which His sayings descend upon the low levels of earthly opinion at once awakens attention and manifests the truth. The things He speaks are too great not to be true; just as we discern the reality of His personality by the very fact of its moral and spiritual stature. It is too great to be a merely human product.

Finally, the principle of faith, as we have ventured to define it, has been at work in the statement of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. Before the advent of our

Lord, the truest faith was that of the Jew, who held fast to the Unity of the Godhead. For his thought the Deity was just one great Person exalted above all creation in lonely isolation. But with the coming of Christ there entered a great new fact into the religious experience of humanity—the manifestation of a Person distinct from the Supreme Father, yet declared to be Divine by the nature of His personality and the events of His life. In the simple language derived from the facts of human relationship, He was defined as the Son of God. But how was such a Being to be thought of? Set above all angels by the witness of His own teaching and the nature of His work. He could be nothing but God manifested in the flesh. Yet how was such a doctrine to be reconciled with the great truth of the Unity of the Godhead? Only in one way could such a reconciliation be effected,—the Unity of the Godhead must contain within it a Divine multiplicity. And faith did not hesitate to take this step, for it felt that no mystery could be too profound for the inmost Being of the Godhead, and that no language could fully express that mystery. Nay, when this step had been taken, there emerged into fuller light certain truths which before had been felt but not realised. The agency of the Divine Spirit, for example, as distinct from the Father and the Son. It became clear also that as in God there is a distinction of Persons, so there is within His Unity an Eternal Love, the bond of union between the Divine Persons. Thus love belongs to the very nature of God. Again, the amazing sacrifice of the cross and the joy of the resurrection acquired new meanings, and a new power over the soul of man. Christians saw what was meant by the statement that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." They felt something of the depth of that great love which so loved the world as to give the only-begotten Son. They felt that the conquest of death in the resurrection was no isolated event, but possessed a universal significance.

Thus the sublime daring of faith, by which she refused to be deterred from making the final unification of her thought about God, yielded abundant fruit in the satisfac-

tion of man's deepest spiritual needs. Venturing to think the greatest possible thoughts about God—venturing indeed to believe the greatest things about God, even though the limits of consistent thinking might seem to be passed—faith found herself in possession of an infinite treasury of spiritual blessing.

Faith is, then, simply the human soul trusting God in all the difficulties of experience. And this trust in God involves the conviction that the highest conception of His nature must always be the truest. As difficulties have arisen one after another in the course of experience, faith has trusted, and in trusting has risen ever higher in her thoughts about God, and so has overcome; and as the difficulties are always of the nature of division—the emerging, that is, of a want of harmony in thought and life—faith becomes ever more and more a unifying principle.

How, then, we may ask, can faith be distinguished from reason, for reason also is a unifying principle? It is true, indeed, that reason is a principle of unification. Like faith, it encounters difficulties and overcomes them. But its method is different, for it produces unity by discovering the causal or logical nexus which underlies the multiplicity of the world. Thus reason reduces the facts with which it deals to a network of necessary relations. But the difficulties with which faith deals in its most characteristic activity are of another kind. They are the fundamental problems in which no causal or logical nexus can be discovered by human powers. Reason has struggled from the dawn of philosophic thought with these problems, and failed. They are especially the great questions which deal with God and His relation to man, with free-will, and the mysteries of pain and evil. Faith boldly passes the chasms in thought represented by these questions, and believes where it cannot prove. And its whole creed may be summed up in this,—that God is trustworthy. In spite of all the perplexities of life, it will trust God—trust Him utterly. And in the exercise of this trust the soul has been led to one belief about God after another, ascending ever higher and higher, and so has found a creed.

There is a school of thought which will prefer to call this activity of the human spirit by the name of Reason; and it must be granted that faith and reason are closely related. There is no advantage in disputing about names. But the peculiar nature of the spiritual process when it deals with the great fundamental problems is essentially one of trust in the character of God; and this surely may more truly be described by the name Faith than in any other way. And here once again we are led to a point of view from which we discern the contrast between the natural and the supernatural.

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